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Alice Walker: A Literary Genealogist

by

Paege Alessandra Moore

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Paege A Moore

Paege Alessandra Moore
7, 1216 - 15 Avenue S. W.
Calgary, Alberta T3C 0X5
pamoore@aol.com

September 18, 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Alice Walker: Literary Genealogist submitted by Paege Alessandra Moore in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Daphne Read

Dr. Daphne Read

Lahoucine Ouzgane

Dr. Lahoucine Ouzgane

Nasrin Rahimieh

Dr. Nasrin Rahimieh

July 28, 1998

Keep in mind always the present you are constructing.

It should be the future you want.

--Ola, The Temple of My Familiar by Alice Walker

This dissertation is dedicated to Sputnik who insisted I remain at my desk.

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Introduction

The focus of this thesis is to examine Alice Walker's novel Possessing the Secret of Joy within the constructs of an established African American literary genealogy. Walker quotes musician Stevie Wonder in the epigraph to The Color Purple:

> *Show me how to do like you*
> *Show me how to do it.* (Walker, Color ii)

This simple lyric reveals the circular nature of Walker's perspective. Walker is interested in the inter-connectedness of the universe and the ways in which her ancestors--familial and literary--are models for her life and writing. She connects herself, first and foremost, to the African American literary tradition and claims her mother and Zora Neale Hurston as her primary models for her own creative and literary endeavors. Hurston's experiences of poverty, racism, and sexism as a struggling early twentieth century African American woman writer inspired Walker to persevere and overcome the obstacles she was faced with: poverty, racism, and the physical wounding of her eye. The character Janie Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God provides a model for Walker's female characters. Additionally, Hurston's fictional writing about the economics of African American women's oppression by men opened the door for Walker to do the same with her characters. Walker draws on the precedent set by Hurston; as a result, similar themes reappear in Walker's work, including: the use of African American vernacular; focus on women's roles within the African American community; female sexuality within the context of women's achievement of personal growth, individuation, and the desire for control over their sexual and physical selves.

The protagonists of Their Eyes Were Watching God, The Color Purple, and Possessing the Secret of Joy all ultimately reject patriarchy and connect with a community of women in order to escape patriarchy and achieve selfhood. Janie

Crawford overcomes poverty and marital abuse to become a financially and sexually independent African American woman. Following in Hurston's footsteps, Walker's female characters provide vehicles by which Walker can expound her womanist views and rail against patriarchal oppression. Celie provides a vehicle by which to argue against child abuse, incest, and marital abuse in The Color Purple.

Having established a context within which to discuss female sexuality, Walker broadens her frame of reference from African American women to include African women as well and, ultimately, women worldwide. Tashi's experience of female genital mutilation in Possessing the Secret of Joy enables Walker to express her views about the physical and psychic devastation that occurs in women who are subject to this ancient patriarchal ritual. The anger expressed by Janie, Celie, and Tashi gives them the strength to resist the stranglehold of patriarchy; unfortunately, anger is expressed at the risk of the three women sinking into or struggling against various forms of madness. In her writing, Walker establishes a community of women within which her characters can survive, heal their physical and psychic wounds, and achieve selfhood. Her larger political and social agenda is to create a community of women amongst her readers and a means by which female genital mutilation and other abuses of women can be eradicated on a global scale. By modeling her life and her writing on her creative and literary ancestors, Walker has created a framework whereby her readers and future writers may see her life and writing as a model for their own. Thus, like Nettie in The Color Purple, she and, she hopes, her readers "will be working for a common goal: the uplift of black people everywhere" (Walker, Color 143).

Chapter 1:

Alice Walker's Creative and Literary Genealogy

> There are those who believe Black people possess the secret of joy and that it is this that will sustain them through any spiritual or moral or physical devastation.
> --Alice Walker, Possessing the Secret of Joy iii

Alice Walker identifies herself primarily as an African American woman situated within African American culture; it is for this reason that she chooses African American women as her main role models. Perhaps her poem "In These Dissenting Times" best expresses the importance that acknowledging one's genealogical, literary, and creative ancestors has for Walker:

> *To acknowledge our ancestors*
> *means we are aware that we did not make*
> *ourselves, that the line stretches*
> *all the way back, perhaps, to God; or*
> *to Gods. We remember them because it*
> *is an easy thing to forget: that we*
> *are not the first to suffer, rebel,*
> *fight, love and die. The grace with*
> *which we embrace life, in spite of*
> *the pain, the sorrows, is always a*
> *measure of what has gone before.*
> (Walker, Her Blue Body 155)

Although she identifies herself most closely with African American culture and African American women, Walker envisions the body of literature as one immense story written from a multitude of perspectives by writers from just as many different cultures. Walker often expresses admiration for writers from cultures other than her own, but, for the

purposes of this study, I will focus attention on African American and white female writers from the American South.

In "Saving the Life That Is Your Own," Walker writes that both Kate Chopin's The Awakening and Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God are "indispensable to my own growth, my own life" (Walker, In Search 7). This is because, for Walker, the fundamental difference (if there is one) between white and African American writers is less important than the different perspectives white and African American writers hold on various subjects:

> It is not the difference between them that interests me, but, rather, the way black writers and white writers seem to me to be writing one immense story--the same story, for the most part--with different parts of this immense story coming from a multitude of different perspectives. (Walker, In Search 5)

Thus, Walker's interest lies in trying to piece together the different pieces of the puzzle that form the whole story:

> Well, I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story. And the whole story is what I'm after. (Walker, In Search 48-49)

Nonetheless, Walker finds that it is impossible to "completely identify" with white literature because it represents a culture which is not her own.

Walker's early upbringing and education did not provide her with any African American women role models for her to look to as guides in her own development as an African American woman writer. Naturally, her discovery of Zora Neale Hurston, the most prolific African American woman writer of her time, author of "four novels, two books of folklore, an autobiography, numerous stories, articles, and plays," had a profound effect on Walker's life and writings (Washington, "Zora Neale Hurston" 8). Her feelings of connection with Hurston's life and her work are significant as, up to this

point for Walker, her only models had been male African American writers and writers from the dominant culture, that is, white writers. Although Walker is willing to glean what she perceives as valuable from these writings, it is her connection with Zora Neale Hurston that solidifies in her mind the establishment of and the importance of an African American literary tradition written by women. The basis for my study is literary and creative genealogy and its impact on Walker's work; therefore, it is important to give some attention to the early and primarily male African American literary tradition out of which the female African American tradition arose. Following this brief examination of early African American literary history, I will examine Walker's development as a writer, including the impact Zora Neale Hurston had on her life and her work, in order to more fully understand the literary tradition in which Walker locates herself.

Walker's literary history is grounded in the history of slave literature, in the writings of both African slaves and emancipated African Americans. This literature celebrates the attainment of personal, physical and intellectual freedom of the African American people through emancipation as a whole as well as the personal freedom of the African American individual. William L. Andrews offers a succinct explication of the early development of the African American novel in his essay "The 1850s: The First Afro-American Literary Renaissance," beginning with the fugitive-slave narrative. This earliest form of African American writing has its ancestry in the "Protestant spiritual autobiography and conversion narrative, the captivity narrative, and travel writing genres" of the eighteenth century ("1850s" 39). Andrews argues that the early slave narrative adopted a "Christian perspective in which the slave pictures himself as a pilgrim passing through a world of sin and suffering" using only "'honest means' to end [his or her] physical bondage to slavery" ("1850s" 40).

The abolitionist movement of the early nineteenth century saw only limited progress in its efforts to achieve freedom and equality for African Americans even after

the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. Thus, the freedom movement became more militant and there was a move towards more "'un-Christian' means of becoming free" (Andrews, "1850s" 40). The Emancipation Proclamation did not apply to many of the Southern states, so it became common practice for slaves to use whatever means, legal or otherwise, to flee their owners in the hope of finding freedom in the North. The individuals, African American and white, who took it upon themselves to assist in this illegal migration of slaves became known as The Underground Railroad. One of the best known female abolitionists was Harriet Tubman, who fled to the North when she was twenty-five: "Freedom felt so good that Harriet Tubman returned to the South nineteen times and brought out more than three hundred slaves" (Bennett, Mayflower 167).

It was during this period of militant abolitionism, characterized by Tubman's efforts, that the fugitive-slave narrative developed. It was used primarily as propaganda by the abolitionist movement to reveal the facts of slavery to an unsympathetic white public. As dissemination of the facts of slavery was foremost in the minds of non-abolitionist publishers and editors, the authors of these fugitive-slave narratives were discouraged from expressing their opinions about those facts. One such instance of white over-writing of African American authorship is A Brief Account of the Life, Experiences, Travels, and Gospel Labors of George White, An African. Written By Himself and Revised by a Friend (1810) (Sekora and Baker, "Written Off" 43). Authors such as Frederick Douglass, who wrote one of the better known fugitive-slave narratives, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave (1845), felt stifled by the restrictions put on the genre. Douglass concluded that, "[i]t did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* wrongs; I felt like *denouncing* them. . . . Besides, I was growing [intellectually], and needed room" (Bennett, Mayflower 157).

The development and expansion of African American literature into previously unoccupied territories are clear in the works of William Wells Brown. Brown began his literary career with a traditionally styled slave narrative titled The Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave (1847). Following this effort, Brown's horizons expanded with a trip to Europe, the product of which was his travel book, Three Years in Europe (1852), the first non-slave narrative written by an African American man. Thus, Brown was the first African American author to make the intellectual leap from slave narrative, where his subject and his exploration of it were restricted by abolitionist politics, to a genre where he had free reign to choose and write about his subject in his desired style.

Brown's intellectual and literary growth did not stop there. In Clotel; or, The President's Daughter (1853), his next book, Brown managed to weave together a mesh of objective facts about slavery as well as "subjective interpretation of the country's myths and symbols" (Andrews, "1850s" 47). Brown typecast Thomas Jefferson (a slave owner who had at least four children by one of his female slaves, Sally Hemings) as a stereotypical Democrat and then debunked him as a hypocrite for writing the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776), which declared that, in theory, "all men are created equal," but which, in practice, failed to include African Americans in its definition. By casting Jefferson, a prominent political leader, as an archetype of white injustice toward African Americans, Brown implicated all whites who thought and behaved in a similar fashion. Brown and Frank J. Webb, the African American author of The Garies and Their Friends (1857), were two of a number of African American writers instrumental in "enlarging the boundaries of the Afro-American fictive world, and shedding the point of view of the traditional Afro-American narrative voice, that of the untutored ex-slave from the South" (Andrews, "1850s" 47).

Still missing from the African American literary world was a "black nationalistic culture hero" whom other African Americans could look to, identify with and be inspired

by (Andrews, "1850s" 48). Martin R. Delany filled this gap with Blake; or the Huts of America (1859). The protagonist of this serially published novel becomes a fugitive slave, but, instead of seeking freedom in the North as one would expect, he "chooses instead to seek a higher ideal, the spiritual enlightenment of his fellow slave as preparation for their eventual revolt" (Andrews, "1850s" 49). Knowledge is the key to spiritual freedom as Delany sees it and, once achieved, spiritual freedom is but a stepping stone to physical freedom through mass revolt. This theme of empowerment as a reaction to the oppression of slavery and racism through the attainment of knowledge runs through the rest of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century with the exception of Booker T. Washington. [1]

Washington, author of Up From Slavery (1901), negates the historical past of African Americans before slavery and claims the beginning of slavery as the beginning of the growth and development of the African American people through opportunities provided in the Americas (freeing whites from the responsibility of enslaving and oppressing a race). Conversely, W. E. B. Du Bois, in his collection of essays titled The Souls of Black Folk (1903), reclaims that historical past. Rather than starting at the point of enslavement with a *tabula rasa*, or blank slate, on which to inscribe the future of African Americans as did Washington, Du Bois' attitude toward slavery reflects his sense of connection with pre-slavery Africans. Du Bois had a clear mental image of "the mind of the black, both in Africa and as a slave brought to the New World" (qtd. in Rampersad, "Slavery" 115). He writes,

> Endowed with a rich tropical imagination . . . and a keen, delicate appreciation of Nature, the transplanted African lived in a world animate with gods and devils, elves and witches; full of strange influences,--of Good to be implored, of Evil to be propitiated. Slavery, then, was to him the dark triumph of Evil over him. All the fateful powers of the Underworld were striving against him, and a spirit of revolt and revenge filled his heart. (qtd. in Rampersad, "Slavery" 115)

It was this sense of a uniquely valuable historical past prior to slavery, as well as the experience of slavery itself, which inspired African American men and women to continue to fight against oppression and to strive for independence in all areas of life.

Repatriation to Africa was suggested at various times by whites, who wanted to be rid of African Americans after slavery was abolished, as well as by African Americans, who were tired of the ritual abuse, racism, and discrimination. Regardless, African American culture grew out of the forced emigration from Africa to America where African Americans were enslaved for centuries. As Amiri Baraka notes, slaves were "not moving alone. Their goals must be won on three levels: freedom of the body, freedom of the mind and spirit, and freedom for the whole Negro people" ("Black Literature" 28). The African American struggle for identity is ongoing as African Americans try to find their place in a society that designated their place as subservient to that of those who brought them to America.

This decision to claim African American history, before, during, and after slavery, and to accept its implications and consequences, good and bad, stayed with African American artists from the first African American Literary Renaissance of the 1850s into the Harlem Renaissance of the early twentieth century. Alain Locke's 1925 essay, "The New Negro," discusses the sociological consequences of "'the tide of Negro migration, northward, and city-ward'":

> Where once there were personal and intimate relations, in which individuals were in contact at practically all points of their lives, there are now group relations in which the whole structure is broken up and reassorted . . . There is a racial as well as social disorientation. (qtd. in Lenz, "Southern Exposures" 85-86)

This feeling of disorientation resulted from the deterioration of cultural traditions which were much more solidly embedded in the closely knit communities of the South than in the disconnected African American communities formed by individuals who migrated to

the North. Desire to preserve the African American cultural traditions of the South prompted a movement in the arts toward the creation of an African American aesthetic.

James Weldon Johnson attempted to define the requirements of such an aesthetic in 1921:

> The colored poet in the United States needs . . . to find a form that will express the racial spirit by symbols from within rather than by symbols from without, such as the mere mutilation of English spelling and pronunciation. He needs a form that is freer and larger than dialect, but which will still hold the racial flavor; a form expressing imagery, the idioms, the peculiar turn of thought, and the distinctive humor and pathos, too, of the Negro, but which will also be capable of voicing the deepest and highest emotions and aspirations, and allow of the widest range of subjects and the widest scope of treatment. (qtd. in Lenz, "Southern Exposures" 87-88)

Johnson's view on the value of African American vernacular in African American writing is further explicated and criticized in Frantz Fanon's discussion of this cultural phenomenon in his classic text, Black Skin, White Masks: "The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards," including, in particular, its language (18). Conversely, other African American artists, among them Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker, chose to claim the African American vernacular (that Johnson berates and Fanon criticizes) as a vital part of African American culture and expression. Continuing along the same lines regarding the development of an African American aesthetic, Langston Hughes, a prominent African American poet, declared in 1926 that the drive behind the Harlem Renaissance was the determination of African American artists to "'express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame'" (Andrews, "1850s" 38).

The Harlem Renaissance was so named because Harlem "symbolized the central experience of American blacks in the early twentieth century--the urbanization of black America" (Wintz, Black Culture 3). The migration of so many African Americans to the

localized area of Harlem resulted in a loose coalescence of talented artistic and creative African Americans who became know as the "Negro intelligentsia" and who produced much of the creative work of the early twentieth century within the African American community. Based on his study of the first African American literary renaissance, Andrews asserts that the rebirth of the "spirit of artistic self-reliance and creative autonomy [during the Harlem Renaissance] . . . was the legacy of an earlier generation of Afro-American writers" ("1850s" 38).

This history of African American writers is one with which Alice Walker, a modern African American woman writer, identifies. Affirming its continuation in modern African American writing, Walker says that, unlike writing by white authors that seems to have a defeatist gloom, "black writers seem always involved in a moral and/ or physical struggle, the result of which is expected to be some kind of larger freedom" (Walker, In Search 5). This struggle for freedom can be traced all the way back to the early slave narratives (only twelve percent of which were written by women), the origin of the African American literary tradition (Washington, "Meditations on History" 7). In The Color Purple, as well as in Possessing the Secret of Joy, Walker draws on the slave narrative form in order to emphasize the subjective centrality of the first person narrators of these novels, or, as Susan Willis notes, "to wrest the individual black subject out of anonymity, inferiority and brutal disdain" ("Alice Walker's Women" 213). In the case of The Color Purple, the individual character of Celie is a figure who, while her experience is not representative of the experience of all African American women in the South, stands for the experience of a significant number of African American women who had to contend with racism, sexism, and abuse, all dealt by either fellow African Americans or by the white population. The broader experience of "larger freedom" that is the hopeful outcome of African American literature of which Walker speaks is both a physical and a spiritual freedom.

The literary risks taken by African American authors as a result of their "confidence in [their] creative sel[ves]" ultimately led to "the rise of the novel out of the slave narrative" (Andrews 'The 1850s" 50). Further, "an inward-directed candor about the psychological development of the self inspired an equally important generic evolution from the slave narrative--the black American autobiography," a genre which allowed African American writers to further consider "the nature of the Afro-American quest for selfhood" (Andrews, "1850s" 50-51). Selfhood no longer held the traditional meaning of physical freedom from the bonds of slavery; rather, the definition of selfhood had come to mean a spiritual knowledge of self as well. For example, both Henry Bibb's Narrative (1849) and Samuel Ringgold Ward's Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro (1855) explore the struggle for freedom on a physical as well as psychological level. Expanding on the theme of freedom, Frederick Douglass' My Bondage and My Freedom (1855) is the first autobiography which "melded a black man's experience as a slave *and* freeman into a unified initiation pattern;" there is an underlying element of psychological exploration which leads Douglass to a "liberating self- and social consciousness" (Andrews, "1850s" 51).

In addition to the new psychological element of African American literature, there was a "redefining of the concept of heroism in terms of artistic truth to the self" (Andrews, "1850s" 53). For example, Samuel Ringgold Ward identified truth as "freedom to express a bitterness toward America" and the way African Americans are treated by whites (Andrews, "1850s" 53). Baraka, expressing his belief in the universality of African American life and experience, notes that by the time of the Garvey Movement of the early 1920s, the "national sector of the Black bourgeoisie had developed an international consciousness: a national consciousness *aware of its own interests, domestically and internationally*" ("Black Literature" 146-147). While early African American authors were keen to develop themselves individually and self-

consciously, they were also aware of their bond to the African American community: "the African American autobiography and *Bildungsroman* was grounded in a sustaining cultural tradition that sees self-discovery and self-expression leading to a nurturing community identification and ultimately a hopeful conclusion to the black quest in America" (Andrews, "1850s" 60).

The quest in African American literature for physical and spiritual freedom takes us full circle to Alice Walker's assertion that African American writers expect to gain a "larger freedom" as a result of their "moral and/ or physical struggle" (In Search 5). Acknowledging the African American literary history she claims for herself and other African American writers, Walker says: "[O]ur literary tradition is based on the slave narratives, where escape for the body and freedom for the soul went together" (In Search 5). This is particularly true in African American women's slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written By Herself (1861), where "the authors placed in the foreground their active roles as historical agents as opposed to passive subjects; represented as acting their own visions, they are seen to take decisions over their own lives. They document their sufferings and brutal treatment but in a context that is also the story of resistance to brutality" (Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood 36). All of these components are seen in the lives of Janie Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God, Celie in The Color Purple, and Tashi in Possessing the Secret of Joy.

Unfortunately, "the major texts of the Black Aesthetic ignored or patronized women's imaginative and critical writing;" the fortunate result, however, was that "black feminist writers and critics began to make their voices heard within the literary community" (Showalter, "Criticism" 352). As Washington notes, "the creation of fiction is a matter of power, not justice," and the fact that "power has always been in the hands

of men--mostly white but some black" put African American women writers in a marginalized position where their writings were discredited, criticized, and ignored ("Darkened Eye" xvi-xviii). American women writers such as "Harriet Jacobs (Linda Brent), Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Fannie Barrier Williams, Marita Bonner, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Ann Petry, Dorothy West, and Gwendolyn Brooks" are just a few of the writers who "have been dismissed by Afro-American literary critics until they were rediscovered and reevaluated by feminist critics" (Washington, "Darkened Eye" xx).

Once discovered and reclaimed by feminist critics, it became apparent that the writings of African American women were similar to those of African American men. Like their male counterparts, African American women often had a political agenda and wrote with the goal of achieving equality with whites and of having their own spiritual, physical, and intellectual freedoms recognized. In addition, African American women's texts "are clearly involved with issues of social justice: the rape of black women, the lynching of black men, slavery and Reconstruction, class distinctions among blacks, and all forms of discrimination against black people" (Washington, "Darkened Eye" xxii).

African American women writers also recognized and challenged their marginalized position within the African American community where they were treated as "'the *mule[s]* of the world'" (Walker, In Search 232). As Cheryl Wall points out, "'mules' . . . refers to the exploitation of black people's labor, not to black women. However, in Their Eyes Were Watching God [and in the writings of Alice Walker] . . . the metaphor of the mule becomes a metaphor for the female condition; the burdens borne are not only those imposed by physical labor, but by sexist attitudes" ("Mules and Men" 666).

Moreover, and more significant, is the fact that, unlike African American literature written by men, African American women's literature

> is about black women; it takes the trouble to record the thoughts, words, feelings, and deeds of black women, experiences that make the realities of being black in America look very different from what men have written. There are no women in this tradition hibernating in dark holes contemplating their invisibility; there are no women dismembering the bodies or crushing the skills of either women or men; and few if any, women in the literature of black women succeed in heroic quests without the support of other women or men in their communities. Women talk to other women in this tradition, and their friendships with other women--mothers, sisters, grandmothers, friends, lovers--are vital to their growth and well-being. . . . female relationships are an essential aspect of self-definition for women. (Washington, "Darkened Eye" xxi-xxii)

Mary Katherine Wainwright asserts that African American women writers have added their own slant to the long-standing tradition of protest literature (against the "'economics of slavery'") by including gender protest ("Aesthetics" 2). Perhaps one of the best examples of an African American woman's appropriation of the techniques found in protest literature being joined with that of gender protest is in ex-slave Sojourner Truth's 1851 address to the Woman Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio:

> Dat man ober dar say dat woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place every whar. Nobody eber helped me into carriages, or ober mud puddles, or gives me any best place and ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me--and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man-- (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well--and ar'n't I a woman? I have borne thirteen chilern, and seen em mos' all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard--and ar'n't I a woman? (White, Ar'n't I 14)

According to Wainwright, African American women writers are differentiated, if not by themselves, at least by their critics, from the male African American literature tradition of protest and tragedy by focusing "on community instead of oppression as the *primary* experience (the 'reality') of their narratives and their racial history" ("Aesthetics" 3). For example, when Alice Walker began The Color Purple, she planned to write a historical novel, but notes that, "womanlike," her "'history' starts not with the taking of lands, or

the births, battles, and deaths of Great Men, but with one woman asking another for her underwear" (Walker, "Writing" 453).

Not surprisingly, the strength of the African American community as a whole enabled it to survive the racism and sexism that developed as a result of slavery. Further, the existence of African American women's writings is a testament to women's ability to resist and overcome the attacks, criticism and silencing of their works by both African American male writers and critics. At the forefront of this group of African American women writers and critics is Alice Walker, who claims Zora Neale Hurston, one of few writers of her time who dealt openly with African American female sexuality, "as the literary and critical foremother of the black female literary tradition" (Showalter, "Criticism" 353). Walker, whose focus on general African American history has been secondary, has learned "the importance of diving through politics and social forecasts to dig into the essential spirit of individual persons," a lesson consistent with the difference between African American men and women's literature (Walker, In Search 257).

Walker's choice of the verb "to dig" is significant here because, in many instances, that is precisely what has been necessary to recover the creative legacy of African American artists, particularly that of women. Walker's poem, "Each One, Pull One" describes the artist's task of recovering or "unburying" the lives and works of African American artists:

> We must say it all, and as clearly
> as we can. For, even before we are dead,
> they are busy
> trying to bury us.
> . . . . . .
> In short, we who write, paint, sculpt, dance
> or sing
> share the intelligence and thus the fate
> of all our people
> in this land.
> . . . . . .

Each one must pull one.

Look, I temporarily on the rim
of the grave,
have grasped my mother's hand
my father's leg.
There is the hand of Robeson
Langston's thigh
Zora's arm and hair
your grandfather's lifted chin
the lynched woman's elbow
what you've tried to forget
of your grandmother's frown.

Each one, pull one back into the sun

We who have stood over
so many graves
know that no matter what *they* do
all of us must live or none.
(Walker, Her Blue Body 374-377)

Clearly, Walker figures herself as one of the ones pulling those artists--male and female--about to be lost forever out of the grave so that their legacy can continue and benefit subsequent generations of African Americans.

Although "Each One, Pull One" mentions the need to recover the lives and works of both African American men and women--the lives and works of the African American community as a whole--Walker's primary interest lies with African American women:

> I am preoccupied with the spiritual survival, the survival *whole* of my people. But beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of black women. (Walker, In Search 250)

Her dedication to the work of recovering and telling the stories and the lives of African American women has resulted in the (re)discovery and recovery of the work of two important artists in Walker's life: her mother and Zora Neale Hurston. Walker, as an African American woman writer "empowered to narrate the stories of Black women who

are past or present creators of a Black female culture," feels that it is her role to enable "Black women, especially those most marginalized by race, caste, and class, to have their voices heard and their histories read" (Butler-Evans, Race, Gender, and Desire 13). Certainly, Walker's mother and Hurston have been marginalized and silenced and their histories, especially Hurston's, have come close to being lost to the African American community. Walker's discovery and others' subsequent rediscoveries of Hurston's life and her work have re-established the importance of Hurston's life and work to the African American literary tradition.

It is significant that Walker, in her desire to preserve African American tradition and culture, is maintaining and preserving the African American cultural tradition that formerly has been in the hands of African American women by virtue of their role during slavery. Bernice Johnson Reagon asserts that although all cultures want to perpetuate and maintain their cultural traditions, the actual work of preserving culture falls to women because women have traditionally been the primary caregivers and educators of young children ("My Black Mothers" 82).

While African American men and women alike were subject to racism by white society and were forced to labor on the plantations and in the cotton fields side by side as slaves, African American women were doubly victimized because of their sex. Because of their ability to produce children who would become slave labor at a marginal and non-monetary cost to the slave owner, African American women were subject to rape by the slave owner. As Carby notes, even though African American female sexuality was not part of the definition of the cult of true womanhood, which figured the woman as the center of home and hearth, it created an "alternative sexual code" which defined the sexual code of motherhood: "the glorified and the breeder" (Reconstructing Womanhood 30). The double victimization of the African American woman comes into play when one considers that the African American male's sense of masculinity was undermined

because, in addition to having no control over the economic, political, or social spheres of his life, he was not able to take the standard and expected patriarchal role of head of the household as its sole provider and caretaker. To add insult to injury, he could not prevent his wife or partner from being raped by his owner. Frustration at his inability to escape the bonds of slavery led to further discrimination: sexism against the African American woman in the form of abuse. Sexual and physical abuse is an issue of control and "control is bought by cordoning off those aspects of sexuality that threaten to make women feel powerless" (Washington, "Darkened Eye" xxiv).

Though enslaved and abused by men, both African American and white, and forced to be "'the *mule[s]* of the world,'" African American women were still able to preserve a degree of control over their own domestic situation (Walker, In Search 232). Despite the fact that African American women often had to sacrifice taking care of their own families to the degree they would have liked in order to be "mammy" to the slave owner's children, African American women strived to raise and educate their children, and to pass African American traditions and culture learned from their mothers on to the next generation. These traditions included storytelling, rootworking, conjuring, quilting, and gardening among others--all activities which fed the spiritual "springs of creativity" within them, a "spirituality [] so intense, so deep, so *unconscious*, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held" (Walker, In Search 232). Confirming this, Reagon states, "[b]lack women are nationalists in our efforts to form a nation that will survive in this society, and we are also the major cultural carriers and passers-on of the traditions of our people" ("My Black Mothers" 82).

Beginning, then, with Walker's rediscovery or discovery of her mother's artistic and creative work, one realizes that, although the creative impulse has at times been repressed, African American women have always found an artistic outlet. Walker recalls that, as a child, she heard stories which "came from [her] mother's lips as naturally as

breathing" (In Search 240). In addition to hard labor in the fields as a sharecropper, the care and maintenance of the family home, and the raising of eight children, Walker's mother still found time to relate these stories to her children, passing on the African American cultural tradition of oral storytelling.

There was often not enough time to finish the stories she started due to her workload, but Walker's mother found other creative expression in her gardening. Walker says of her mother's artistic, creative side:

> The artist that was and is my mother showed itself to me only after many years. . . . Whatever she planted grew as if by magic . . . A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people . . . ask to stand or walk among my mother's art. (Walker, In Search 240-241)

Walker noticed more than the art itself; she looked into her mother's face as she was creating and understood the necessity of having a creative outlet:

> I notice that it is only when my mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible--except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty.
>
> Her face, as she prepares the Art that is her gift, is a legacy of respect she leaves to me, for all that illuminates and cherishes life. She has handed down respect for the possibilities--and the will to grasp them. (Walker, In Search 241-242)

So while Walker did not inherit a talent for gardening necessarily (although she may have), the legacy which Walker has inherited from her mother is a talent for story-telling. Walker inherited the "creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see" due to the restrictive circumstances surrounding their own lives which prevented their own creative "flowers" from coming to full bloom (Walker, In Search 240).

Perhaps it is because circumstances prevented Walker's mother from completing her stories that Walker herself decided that she would like to finish what her mother

started by preserving on paper forever the stories her mother passed on orally. Walker's transcription of oral literature, like Hurston's, broke "the mystique of connection between literary authority and patriarchal power"; their acts of putting pen to paper and writing their oral traditions claimed a space in which African American women could express themselves on paper (Pryse and Spillers, Conjuring 12).

After all, Walker says of her writing: "I write not only what I want to read . . . I write all the things *I should have been able to read*" (Walker, In Search 13). Is it any surprise then that the stories Walker tells are the stories her mother told Walker as a child?

> [S]o many of the stories that I write, that we all write, are my mother's stories. . . . [T]hrough years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories--like her life--must be recorded. (Walker, In Search 240)

This "urgency" to complete her mother's stories is heightened in light of Walker's desire to find a "wholeness" through her writing because "everything around [her] is split up, deliberately split up. History split up, literature split up, and people are split up too" (Walker, In Search 48).

Walker's conversation with her mother about Flannery O'Connor, one of many white Southern writers whose work was more readily available than the writings of African Americans, reveals her longing to put the pieces together to create that "wholeness":

> I believe that the truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story. And the whole story is what I'm after. (Walker, In Search 49)

In her essay "Beyond the Peacock," Walker offers an example of how she and her mother might possess two parts of a story which together might form a whole. Walker

tells her mother about O'Connor's story, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," in which an African American woman hits a white woman with her purse for patronizing her son. Walker's mother asks, "'What did the black woman do after she knocked the white woman down and walked away?'" Walker responds, "'it is, to me, only half a story. *You* might know the other half'" (Walker, In Search 51). Walker's mother does know the other half; she provides the model for the story and character of Sophia in Walker's The Color Purple when she replies, "'Well, I'm not a writer, but there *was* an old white woman I once wanted to strike . . .'" (Walker, In Search 51). While Walker's vision of the "whole story" includes recognition of the importance of the works of her literary ancestors, both canonical white and African American writers, her primary interest is in telling the missing pieces of the "whole story," that is, the stories of African American men and women. This is particularly clear in the preface of In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose where she quotes Bernice Reagon's comment in Black Women and Liberation Movements:

> *I come out of a tradition where those things are valued; where you talk about a woman with big legs and big hips and black skin. I come out of a black community where it was all right to have hips and to be heavy. You didn't feel that people didn't like you. The values that [imply] you must be skinny come from another culture . . . Those are not the values that I was given by the women who served as my models. I refused to be judged by the values of another culture. I am a black woman and I will stand as best as I can in that imagery.* (qtd. in Walker In Search 2)

Like Reagon, Walker identifies herself with African American culture and chooses women from that community as her primary role models. It is by acknowledging her community and her ancestors, both literary and genealogical, that she is able to connect with the past and is able to carry the past into the future with her own writing.

A key moment in Walker's career as a writer took place when she was researching voodoo for a story called "The Revenge of Hannah Kemhuff." Growing up, Walker had often heard her mother tell a tale of personal victory gained over a white

woman through the practice of voodoo. Additionally, Walker's aunt was reputed to have been cured of madness through voodoo practiced by the local conjurer (Walker, In Search 11). While researching, Walker learned that the only people who had written about black folklore, voodoo, and superstition were white and largely racist and therefore untrustworthy as collectors of African American folklore. Then she saw Zora Neale Hurston's name in a footnote to a white writer's text. Walker soon learned that Hurston's qualifications as a writer, folklorist, and anthropologist qualified her to be more than a footnote. Acknowledged in her own day as one of the stars of the Harlem Renaissance, Hurston was also a

> member of the American Folklore Society, the American Anthropological Society, American Ethnological Society, New York Academy of Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and she was listed in the 1937 edition of Who's Who in America. . . . and, most important, she had published an exceptional body of literature. (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 145)

Walker soon located Mules and Men, "Zora's book on folklore, collecting, herself, and her small, all-black community of Eatonville, Florida" (Walker, In Search 83). Naturally, Walker was elated at her discovery: "What I had discovered, of course, was a model, " one of the "pieces" that would join together to form Walker's "whole" (Walker, In Search 12).

In an essay titled "Saving the Life that Is Your Own," Walker discusses the importance of models, of foundations on which to base one's work and one's life:

> The absence of models, in literature as in life, to say nothing of painting, is an occupational hazard for the artist, simply because models in art, in behavior, in growth of spirit and intellect--even if rejected--enrich and enlarge one's view of existence. (Walker, In Search 4-5)

Walker's discovery of, identification with, and admiration for Hurston's life and writings filled a void in Walker's life: "I became aware of my need of Zora Neale Hurston's work some time before I knew her work existed" (Walker, In Search 83).

The first of Hurston's works that Walker read, Mules and Men, made clear exactly what was missing in Walker's education and in the everyday lives of African American women. Hurston was a model of an African American feminist, that is, what Walker termed a "womanist," a woman who has "affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation" (Walker, In Search 81). Mules and Men gave African Americans, including Walker's own relatives, "back all the stories they had forgotten or of which they had grown ashamed (told to us years ago by our parents and grandparents--not one of whom could *not* tell a story to make you weep, or laugh) and showed how marvelous, and, indeed, priceless, they are" (Walker, In Search 85). Mules and Men showed African Americans to be "descendants of an inventive, joyous, courageous, and outrageous people; loving drama, appreciating wit, and, most of all relishing the pleasure of each other's loquacious and *bodacious* company" (Walker, In Search 85).

Walker was impressed by the strong sense of community Hurston's characters show and discovered that it was derived from the closely knit African American community in which Hurston herself grew up. Eatonville, Florida, incorporated in 1886, was, as Mary Helen Washington writes,

> a "pure Negro town--charter, mayor, council, town marshal, and all." It was . . . a rich source of black cultural traditions where Zora would be nourished on black folktales and tropical fruits and sheltered from the early contacts with racial prejudice that have so indelibly marked almost all other Afro-American writers. ("Zora Neale Hurston" 9)

Having grown up in such a society, is it any wonder that Hurston's characters are such solid reflections of her own "racial health" (Walker, In Search 85)? In an essay titled "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1928), Hurston reveals her self-confidence and her determination to do what she chose, to live as she chose, regardless of the dictates and the expectations of others. She says,

> I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorry dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it. . . . No, I do not weep at the world--I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife. (qtd. in Walker In Search 115)

One could speculate, as Walker does, that Hurston's often overwhelming confidence resulted from her experience of growing up in Eatonville where her father made the local laws and her mother encouraged her to "'jump at de sun'" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 13).

In Hurston's novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God, the protagonist Janie says, "'It's uh known fact you got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there. Yo' papa and yo' mama and nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 183). Although this statement appears to disclaim the cultural inheritance gleaned from one's family and community in favor of education and experience away from home, Hurston's family and the surrounding community were the primary disseminators of African American culture to Hurston as she was growing up. Washington asserts that Hurston's mother, Lucy Hurston, had the most profound influence on Hurston's young life, even though she died when Zora was thirteen; she "encouraged her daughter's indomitable and creative spirit" ("The Darkened Eye" 9).

Hurston provided a model for Walker in terms of both life and work; although born approximately fifty-three years apart, both Hurston and Walker have trod similar paths in their efforts to become writers. Most similar are the obstacles of poverty, racism, and sexism which both writers had to overcome in order to fulfill their goals. As noted, upon her discovery of Hurston, Walker felt an immediate kinship with her and was able to identify with her life and the subject matter of her writings.

The most obvious starting place in this identification is Hurston and Walker's childhoods; both women grew up in lower class families in the "black belt" of the South.

Hurston was born January 7, 1891, in Eatonville to Lucy Ann Potts Hurston, a schoolteacher, and John Hurston, a carpenter, Baptist preacher, and author of the town laws. Walker describes the effect Hurston's Eatonville upbringing had on Hurston's concept of selfhood as compared to that of other African Americans growing up elsewhere who believed "that their blackness was something wrong with them":

> Zora grew up in a community of black people who had enormous respect for themselves and for their ability to govern themselves. . . . This community affirmed her right to exist, and loved her as an extension of itself." (Walker, In Search 85-86)

In fact, it was not until Hurston left Eatonville at age thirteen to attend an integrated school in Jacksonville that she discovered she was a "little colored girl" (Hurston, I Love Myself 153). Perhaps Hurston drew on her own experience in relating Janie Crawford's realization that she is African American when she does not recognize herself as the dark-skinned child in a photograph:

> "Ah looked at de picture a long time and seen it was may dress and mah hair so Ah said:
> '"Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!"'
> "Den dey all laughed real hard. But before Ah seen de picture Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest." (Hurston, Their Eyes 9)

Neither the author nor Janie, the protagonist of Their Eyes Are Watching God, are aware as children that their race will have any effect on their ability to live their adult lives as they choose. Not seeing race as detrimental to the possibilities available to her, Hurston once claimed that in a sea of white people, where she "feel[s] the most colored," she is "a dark rock surged upon, and overswept, but through it all, [she] remain[s] [her]self" (Hurston, I Love Myself 154).

Having spent her early childhood in a "colourless" environment, Hurston claimed that issues of race had little bearing on her adult life and that her gender was at the core of her identity: "At certain times I have no race, I am *me*. . . . The cosmic Zora emerges.

I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads" (Hurston, I Love Myself 155). Hurston's connection with the "eternal feminine," specifically with her mother and with nature, the latter of which is described in reproductive terms, is detailed in her autobiography Dust Tracks on a Road as well as in her semi-autobiographical novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God. [2]

Hurston's mother had a stronger influence on Hurston as a young girl than did Hurston's father. In fact, Hurston never reconciled her feelings toward her father who, soon after his marriage to Hurston's mother, deserted her and their three children to go "to seek and see" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 9). Not wanting her children to become like their "meandering" father, Hurston's mother was determined to teach them to "stay at home:" "Things like that gave me my first glimmering of the universal female gospel that all good traits and learnings come from the mother's side" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 13). While Hurston's father always tried to break her independent and often impudent spirit, Hurston's mother defended her, saying that she did not want to "'squinch [her] spirit:'" "Zora is my young'un . . . I'll be bound mine will come out more than conquer" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 14).

Conquer Hurston did, but she also inherited (or chose to inherit, as a result of her rejection of her mother's role) her father's taste for wandering and so rejected her mother's hope that Hurston would follow in her footsteps and one day take her place as the head of a home of her own "at the center of the world" (Hurston, Dust Tracks [1984] 36). Instead of focusing on the domestic sphere, Hurston looks outward and makes a connection with the natural world:

> I used to climb to the top of the one of the huge chinaberry trees which guarded our front gate, and look over the world. The most interesting thing that I saw was the horizon. Every way I turned, it was there, and the same distance away. Our house then, was in the center of the world. It grew upon me that I ought to walk out to the horizon and see what the end of the world was like. (Hurston, Dust Tracks 27)

Two childhood events caused Hurston's longings to turn inward: first, her friend Carrie Roberts backed out of a promise to make the journey to the horizon; and second, Hurston's father refused to buy her a horse she hoped would carry her to the horizon (Hurston, Dust Tracks 28-29).

Unable for the moment to physically journey to the horizon, Hurston entered the world of her imagination where she "lived an exciting life unseen" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 30). Still longing to travel, nonetheless, Hurston boldly solicited short rides with vehicles passing by the gate-post where she liked to sit and watch the activity and movement of the outside world. White passers-by paid her with small change for her antics, inadvertently reinforcing her naive yet honest African American pride and self-esteem, qualities revealed in her work throughout her life.

Hurston, known as "Old Smarty" to her schoolmates, gained access to numerous books (as well as pennies and clothes) as a result of her interest in and skill at reading. Through her reading Hurston developed her sense of separateness, that is, the awareness that her inner and outer selves were quite different, distinct, and incompatible with one another. Gradually, Hurston became aware through her reading of the literary classics as well as Greek, Roman, and Norse myths that she was, both spiritually and physically, not where she would like to be:

> My soul was with the gods and my body in the village. People just would not act like gods. Stew beef, fried fat-back and morning grits were no ambrosia from Valhalla. Raking back yards and carrying out chamber-pots, were not the tasks of Thor. I wanted to be away from the drabness and to stretch my limbs in some mighty struggle. (Hurston, Dust Tracks 41)

Perhaps the reason Hurston identified herself with a European heroic figure was that there was no equally heroic counterpart in Afro-American literature. Nonetheless, unable to completely escape "drabness," Hurston found solace and happiness in the woods

where she becomes particularly attached to one tree she named "the loving pine" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 41).

Hurston was the fifth of eight children and when her mother died, Hurston's happy childhood was disrupted; she was "passed around from relative to relative, rejected by her father and his new wife, and forced to fend for herself" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 134). Her mother's death marked Hurston's entrance into womanhood; she realized at this time that her parents did not "always love[] each other" and that her mother "had not always been happy" (Hurston, Their Eyes 20; Dust Tracks 68). This was seen particularly in her father's lack of respect when he refused to grant her mother's last wishes. Because Hurston's mother relied on Hurston to speak for her, her father's denial of her mother's last wishes--to not have the pillow removed from under her head once she was dead, nor have the clock or the mirror covered as custom dictated--also denied Hurston her own voice and autonomy, as seen in the way her father physically restrained her.

Hurston cited the moment of her mother's death and her own "grief of loss, of failure, and of remorse" as the hour that "began [her] wanderings:" geographically, temporally, and spiritually. Transplanted to Jacksonville, Hurston was

> deprived of the loving pine, the lakes, the wild violets down in the woods and the animals I used to know. No more holding down first base on the team with my brothers and their friends. Just a jagged hole where my home used to be. (Hurston, Dust Tracks 71)

Hurston's feelings of displacement as a result of her mother's death led her to articulate her sense of separateness:

> I had always thought I would be in some lone arctic wasteland with no one under the sound of my voice. I found the cold, the desolate solitude, and earless silences, but I discovered that all that geography was within me. It only needed time to reveal it. (Hurston, Dust Tracks 85)

The geography within her was in fact the metaphorical geography of the South as found in the folklore and culture of her fellow African Americans and, through her study of African American songs and stories, she was able to reconnect with her family and her culture which created a space in which her own voice could be heard. After all, she was "a Southerner, [with] the map of Dixie on [her] tongue" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 104). Displaced for the moment, however, Hurston was deprived of access to books and education and was forced to find employment in order to survive; she said, "I wanted family, love and peace and resting place. I wanted books and school" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 97).

After working at a series of odd jobs to support herself, Hurston managed to graduate from Morgan Academy (high school) in June 1918 and then enrolled in Howard University where she studied (intermittently, due to financial difficulties) from 1919 until 1924. At Howard, Hurston "met and studied under poet Georgia Douglas Johnson and the young philosophy professor Alain Locke" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 134). Hurston's short story "John Redding Goes to Sea" caught the attention of Charles S. Johnson, a sociologist who encouraged Hurston to go to New York. By January of 1925 Hurston had arrived in New York with "'$1.50, no job, no friends, and a lot of hope'" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 134). Two of Hurston's short stories, "Spunk" and "Muttsy," were published in Johnson's magazine, Opportunity, in June 1925.

It was at an Opportunity awards dinner that Hurston met two white patrons who were to have a profound influence on her live: novelist Fannie Hurst and Annie Nathan Meyers. Hurst hired Hurston as a chauffeur, secretary, and traveling companion. Hurst's contribution was not entirely selfless; in exchange for her aid, Hurst got a "crash course in black life and culture from the mercurial Hurston, who became the inspiration for and the model for her later best-selling novel of black life, Imitation of Life" (Wintz, Black

Culture 179). Meyers gave Hurston room and board and obtained the scholarship which enabled Hurston to attend Barnard College, from which Hurston graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1928.

At Barnard, Hurston studied under the well-known anthropologist Franz Boas, who encouraged her to recognize the value of the African American lore she had heard growing up in Eatonville "as invaluable folklore, creative material that continued the African oral tradition and reflected the ebb and flow of a people" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 135). Armed with a "$1400 fellowship from the Carter G. Woodson Foundation, Hurston decided to . . . record songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances and games," but failed in her efforts because she

> went about asking, in carefully-accented Barnardese, "Pardon me, do you know any folktales or folk-songs?" [and] the men and women who had whole treasuries of material seeping through their pores looked at me and shook their heads. (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 135)

Hurston returned to New York empty-handed, or, as Hurston put it, she was unable "to collect enough material 'to make a flea a waltzing jacket'" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 135).

Drawing on her first attempt at gathering folklore as an anthropologist, Hurston told a reporter:

> "I needed my Barnard education to help me see my people as they really are. But I found that it did not do to be too detached as I stepped aside to study them. I had to go back, dress as they did, talk as they did, live their life, so that I could get into my stories the world I knew as a child." (Hemenway, "Zora Neale Hurston" 212)

Additionally, the only way the folk who held the wanted folklore would open up to Hurston was if she herself became one of the "folk."

Hurston's education enabled her to recognize the importance and the value of her community's folklore and traditions; she returned to Florida as an anthropologist and

collector of African American folklore. In Mules and Men, Hurston tells a neighbor in her hometown, "'Ah come to collect some old stories and tales and Ah know y'all know a plenty of 'em and that's why Ah headed straight for home.'" B. Moseley, the neighbour, responds to Hurston, "'What do you mean, Zora, them big old lies we tell when we're jus' sittin' around here on the store porch doin' nothin'?'" (Hurston, I Love Myself 85). Hurston admits that the value of those "big old lies" was not apparent to her until she "'was off in college, away from [her] native surroundings'"; the objectivity she gained through "her Harlem experience and her work in anthropology" enabled her to "reconstruct the folk culture and community of her hometown" (Lenz, "Southern Exposures" 105). The folktales of Eatonville are not just "big old lies"; rather, they are evidence of a strong and unique African American cultural heritage with its roots in pre-slavery times in Africa.

Having run out of her fellowship money and back in New York, Hurston struck up an agreement with Charlotte Osgood Mason, a wealthy white widow who insisted on being called "Godmother" by those she supported. Mason was a main source of financial support for many African American artists other than Hurston during the Harlem Renaissance, including Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Richmond Barthe, and Miguel Covarrubias. Mason's interest in African American art arose from the belief (a belief shared by her late husband Dr. Rufus Osgood Mason) that "'the most magnificent manifestations of the spiritual were found in 'primitive' 'child races'" (Story, "Patronage" 285).

Hurston's relationship with Mason began in 1927 and continued until their contract was dissolved in 1931 because Hurston felt stifled by Mason's oppressive control over her life and work. In exchange for financial support for her anthropological research, Hurston was "to limit her correspondence and publish nothing of her research

without private approval" (Walker, In Search 108). As of December 1927, Mason and Hurston had a legally binding contract which read in part as follows:

> "Charlotte L. Mason is desirous of obtaining and compiling certain data relating to the music, folklore, poetry, voodoo, conjure, manifestations of art, and kindred matters existing among American Negroes but is unable because of the pressure of other matters to undertake the collection of this information in person." (Story, "Patronage" 289)

In fact, it was impossible for Mason to collect this information because she was white and would not have access to the folklore and traditions the African American community would offer one of their own, namely, Hurston. Unfortunately for Hurston, despite the creative freedom white patronage bought her, it did not give her ownership over her anthropological findings; they belonged to Mason. Alain Locke, Howard University professor and middleman between Mason and various African American artists, had his own motives for collecting African American art on Mason's behalf: "His stratagem was to use Mason's money to prove how like well-bred, intelligent whites, well-bred, intelligent Afro-Americans were" (Story, "Patronage" 290). According to Hurston, his lack of scruples knew no bounds. Hurston claimed that in his race to lead the Harlem Renaissance, he "ran a 'mental pawnshop,' lending out patronage in exchange for ideas which he took in and 'soon passe[d] off as his own'" (Wintz, Black Culture 116). Other African American writers, including Jean Toomer, Wallace Thurman, and Claude McKay, concurred with Hurston's view of Locke. Despite these obstacles, the money Hurston received from Mason enabled her "to return to the South to collect folklore" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 135). From 1927 to 1931 Hurston "collected mounds of material from small communities in Alabama and Florida," most of it yet unpublished (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 135). After breaking off her relationship with Mason, Hurston found employment in January of 1932 with "the Creative Literature Department of Rollins College at Winter Park, Florida" and produced a

"successful program of Negro art," but was still plagued with the personal problems which would pursue her until her death in 1960: illness and poverty (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 137).

After receiving a fellowship from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation to study anthropology and folklore, Hurston attended Columbia University from 1934 to 1935, but left because she found the structure too restrictive. In May of 1934 Jonah's Gourd Vine was published and the novel sold well: "Reviewers were impressed by the novel's rich language, 'its compelling beauty and deep passion'" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 137). The following year (1935), Mules and Men was published and received poor reviews from African American critics like Sterling Brown, who "found the picture it presented 'too pastoral . . . [it] should be more bitter'" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 139). Among others, white critic Harold Preece took issue with Hurston's decision to title the book Mules and Men because it supposedly degraded the African American race; in fact, Hurston simply exposed the subordinate position African Americans have held in white society (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 139). Hurston responded to criticism from both white and African American critics, saying, "We talk about the race problem a great deal, but we go on living and laughing and striving like everyone else" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 139). Hurston neither made African American life out to be worse than it was (as she saw it), nor did she ignore the reality of African American history in America.

After breaking off relations with Mason in 1936, Hurston received a Guggenheim Fellowship which funded her trip to "collect folklore in the West Indies" for her second book of folklore Tell My Horse (1938). Hurston's musical, The Great Day, was first performed January 10, 1932; at this time she had a brief romance with a twenty-three-year-old cast member of the play. Hurston's best known novel, Their Eyes

Were Watching God (1937), written in just seven weeks, was based on this romance (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 139).

Hurston's third novel, Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939), was written while Hurston taught drama at North Carolina College. Moses, Man of the Mountain received harsh criticism from Hurston's contemporaries; Alain Locke called it "caricature instead of portraiture" and Ralph Ellison declared that "for Negro fiction it did nothing" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 140). Ellison's criticism seems to typify Hurston's falling out with the Harlem Renaissance movement. As Valerie Smith notes, "By mythologizing rugged individuality, physical strength, and geographic mobility, the narratives of men enshrine cultural definitions of masculinity" (Washington, "Meditations on History" 8). Unconventionally, Hurston's female characters--especially Janie Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God--embodied male definitions of masculinity. Additionally, Hurston found most of her subject matter within the African American community and did not use her writing as a forum for discussions of racism as many African American writers did at that time. As Hurston herself said when she was writing Jonah's Gourd Vine, "[s]he wanted to tell a story about 'a man' but 'Negroes were supposed to write about the Race Problem'" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 137).

From October 1941 to January 1942, while working as a story consultant at Paramount Studios, Hurston wrote her autobiography, Dust Tracks on a Road, which was published in 1942 and received favorable reviews, as well as the Anisfield-Wolf Award for "its contribution to better race relations" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 141). [3] Her autobiography increased her popularity as a writer and Hurston was able to sell several articles to various magazines, including American Mercury, Saturday Evening Post, Negro Digest, World Telegram, and Reader's Digest (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 141).

In 1942 at the start of World War II, Hurston moved back to Florida where she stayed until 1947 when she traveled to the Honduras to write Seraph on the Suwannee (1948), a novel about white people written to break "'that silly old rule about Negroes not writing about white people'" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 141). The novel was not well received and critics speculated that Hurston was interested in assimilation.

The downward slide of Hurston's career began on September 13, 1948, when she was arrested in New York and "charged with committing an immoral act with a ten year old"; Hurston was "out of the country at the time of the alleged crime and the charges were subsequently dropped" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 144). However, the sensational press coverage of the story did irreparable damage to Hurston's reputation and self-esteem, causing her to leave New York for Florida and to sever ties with her friends (Hemingway, Dust Tracks xi; Washington, "Zora Neale Hurston" 20).

For the next ten years Hurston worked at odd jobs--maid, librarian, reporter, substitute teacher--just barely making ends meet. Continuing health and money problems forced her to borrow money from friends and left her last writing project, a biography of Herod the Great, incomplete. On October 29, 1959, Hurston had a stroke and unwillingly entered the Saint Lucie County Welfare Home. She died on January 28, 1960 in Fort Pierce, Florida, and is buried in "an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce's segregated cemetery, the Garden of the Heavenly Rest" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 144). Despite Dr. Benton's comments that Hurston was at one time about 200 pounds and appreciated a good meal, Mrs. Sarah Peek Patterson, the director of the mortuary that handled Hurston's burial, understood that Hurston had died of malnutrition (Walker, In Search 111, 102).

Although extremely prolific as a writer and anthropologist throughout her life, Hurston was never able to escape the shadow of poverty which had pursued her from the time of her mother's death. As Walker notes, *"Being broke made all the difference"*

(Walker, In Search 90). Criticism that Hurston was the "'perfect "darkie"'" was the unfortunate outcome of Hurston's necessary dependence "'on the kindness of strangers'" as she felt obliged to perform for and please for those who patronized her work (Walker, In Search 90; Hurston, I Love Myself 10). Her abject dependence on those who funded her work was "a sign of her powerlessness, her inability to pay back her debts with anything but words" (Walker, In Search 91).

Despite her financial hardships and her forced reliance on the patronage of whites to finance her creative works, Hurston was still able to produce works that hold value for readers even today. Sadly, one cannot help but think of what she might have been able to accomplish if money had been more abundant, if she had been able to finance her own creative projects, if her creativity had not been curbed by the restrictions placed on her by her patrons, and if she had been able to afford proper health care. Her impoverished life and her obscured name and reputation as a writer for a period of thirty years following her death are testament to the fact that she was not entirely able to overcome the challenges put to her as a result of her race, class, and gender, despite her overwhelming confidence that she would be able to do so. As Walker notes, "the majority of black women who tried to make a living doing so, died in obscurity and poverty, usually before their time" (Walker, In Search 35). This was certainly true in Hurston's case.

Additionally, Hurston's self-affirming childhood in Eatonville made it nearly impossible for her to represent African Americans as her critics seemed to demand. In an interview, she described the dichotomy between the two popular views of the African American:

> A writer's material is controlled by publishers who think of the Negro as picturesque. . . . There is an over-simplification of the Negro. He is either pictured by the conservatives as happy, picking his banjo, or by the so-called liberals as low, miserable, and crying. The Negro's life is neither of

> these. Rather, it is in-between and above and below these pictures. (qtd. in Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 141)

Hurston spent most of her life combating these stereotypes of American Negro life and, by modern standards, was quite successful; while Hurston's stories do not ignore the reality of or the history of African American life in America, they typically focus on the individual characters and their growth towards selfhood rather than on making a political or social statement designed to encompass the identity of all African Americans.

Hurston was a woman caught between two opposite poles; on the one hand, she asserted that issues of race had no bearing on her writing, that she thought in terms of individuals only. On the other hand, her social position as a well-educated African American writer dependent on the patronage of the white community insisted that she recognize the difference race made in her life and in her writing. The tension this delicate balance caused is what Francoise Lionnet refers to as a "'journey of ethnic self-scrutiny' through dialogic narration that oscillates between the universal and the particular of culture'" (Watson, "Review" 175). Nonetheless, Hurston's contribution to the genre of autobiography revealed many of the difficulties facing an African American writer during the Harlem Renaissance and demonstrated the way in which writing a semi-autobiographical novel produces a more cohesive and internalized writing of oneself than is possible in conventional autobiography. Through the clever mingling of autobiographical truth with imaginative fiction, Hurston was able to reveal herself as an individual while representing the varied identities and culture of the African American "folk." At the same time, because of her less overtly political position as a fiction writer and novelist, she was able to expose some of the racial and gender tensions experienced by herself, other African American artists, and the African American people as a whole.

However, by the standards of the Harlem Renaissance, which wanted to prescribe the subject matter chosen by African American artists, Hurston's work was largely unappreciated as it did not fit into their prescriptions of African American life. This,

compounded with the financial strains caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s, which all but dried up patronage for African American artists, was one of the foremost reasons for the disappearance of her work from the time of her death.

Like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker grew up in an environment which "affirmed her right to exist" and taught her self-confidence. Born February 9, 1944, to sharecropper parents Willie Lee Walker and Minnie Tallulah Grant Walker, Walker's first years in Eatonton, Georgia, were less than privileged. Walker says of growing up poor,

> We knew, I suppose that we were poor. . . . But we never considered ourselves to be poor . . . and because we never believed we were poor, and therefore worthless, we could depend on one another without shame. (Walker, In Search 17)

Although lacking money and material goods, Walker claims a wealth of a different sort: "What the black Southern writer inherits as a natural right is a sense of *community*," the embodiment of which for Walker, as for Hurston, was her mother, whom Walker describes as "a walking history of our community" (Walker, In Search 17). Alongside her mother was a community of women who taught Walker self-confidence and independence:

> Her mother and her aunts were the most independent people the child knew. . . . Their sense of their own completeness certainly helped to instill the quality of assurance in the young Walker that she would need in order to be a black woman writer in America: "Unlike many women who were told throughout their adolescence they must marry, I was never told by my mother or any one of her sisters it was something I need even think about. It is because of them, I know women can do anything and that one's sexuality is not affected by one's work." (Christian, "Alice Walker" 261)

In addition to freedom from the traditional restraints of marriage, the support of this community of women taught Walker that she could pursue and achieve whatever goal she might set her mind to.

Aware of the obstacles race, gender, and class might present, it almost goes without saying that Hurston and Walker had to struggle to attain their goals. For both women, their initial and primary obstacle was class; lower-class women, especially African American women, had (and continue to have) difficulty obtaining money with which to pursue their creative impulses. As Marlene Nourbese Philip asserts in her essay "The Disappearing Debate: Racism and Censorship,"

> [e]ducation, financial resources, belief in the validity of one's experiences and reality, whether working class, female, or Black: these are all necessary to the production of writing. They are also essential factors in the expression of one's ability. (213)

Although Hurston's Eatonville experience and subsequent education gave her the confidence to pursue her goals, neither Hurston's education nor her financial resources came without a struggle.

Walker faced similar challenges. Born over half a century after Hurston, Alice Walker reveals a similar self-confidence to Hurston as she describes herself as a child wanting to go to the fair in "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self":

> Whirling happily in my starchy frock, showing off my biscuit-polished patent-leather shoes and lavender socks, tossing my head in a way that makes my ribbons bounce, I stand, hands on hips, before my father. "Take me, Daddy," I say with assurance; I'm the prettiest!" (Walker, In Search 362)

Six years later, still everyone's darling and every bit the equal of her brothers in playing at cowboys, Walker was discriminated against because of her gender when her brothers were given BB guns and she was not. Forced to play the role of the enemy Indian instead of a cowboy alongside her brothers, Walker was shot in the right eye by one of her

brothers resulting in "a glob of whitish scar tissue, a hideous cataract, on [her] eye" (Walker, In Search 364).

The cause of "the accident," as the family calls it, was attributed to Walker herself and she lost her self-esteem with devastating results. Just as Hurston suffered with her mother's death and subsequent move to Jacksonville where she became aware of her racial difference from other children, Walker and her family relocated also from her former strongly-knit community to a new environment where young Walker felt alone and ugly:

> Now when I stare at people--a favorite pastime, up to now--they will stare back. Not at the "cute" little girl, but at her scar. For six years I do not stare at anyone, because I do not raise my head. (Walker, In Search 364)

Walker's sense of feeling different was exacerbated by the recent historical past in the racist Southern system, a system in which one was told "stories of lynchings" and where, at age twelve, Walker was informed "'the same little white girls who had been her playmates were suddenly to be called "miss"'" (Christian, "Alice Walker" 260-261).

Made ill by her brother's lie that Walker injured herself and he came to her rescue, Walker went to live with her grandparents in her old community, but life was still unstable as she lost her cat, a favorite teacher, and finally her mother. Longing to return to her former state as the pretty child, longing to hold her head up proudly as before, Walker "abuse[d] her eye" nightly: "I rant and rave at it, in front of the mirror. I plead with it to clear up before morning. I tell it I hate and despise it. I do not pray for sight. I pray for beauty" (Walker, In Search 366). When she finally had the cataract removed at age fourteen, Walker changed drastically: "Almost immediately I become a different person from the girl who does not raise her head. Or so I think" (Walker, In Search 366). In fact, Walker did not change physically as much as her attitude about herself changed; she regained her former self-confidence and, head raised, gained

friends, a boyfriend, good grades, and graduated as class "valedictorian, most popular student, and *queen*, hardly believing my luck" (Walker, In Search 367).

Thirty years after her original injury and about to have a media photograph taken, Walker was surprised to find herself uncomfortable with her appearance. It disturbed her, but she found redemption in her daughter, Rebecca, who looked her in the wounded eye, which Walker feared she would find flawed, and said, "Mommy, there's a *world* in your eye" (Walker, In Search 370). Walker's dedication of In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens to Rebecca reveals the impact Rebecca's comment had on her mother:

> To my daughter Rebecca
> Who saw in me
> What I considered
> a scar
> And redefined it
> as
> a world.
> (Walker, In Search ix)

Walker cites Rebecca's moment of (in)sight as the same moment when she was able to re-vision her own damaged eye and recognize her wound, which was both physical and psychological, as healed: "There *was* a world in my eye. And I saw that it was possible to love it: that in fact, for all it had taught me of shame and anger and inner vision, I *did* love it" (Walker, In Search 370). That night Walker dreamed of dancing with another "bright-faced dancer," one who "has obviously come through all right, as I have done. She is beautiful, whole and free. And she is also me" (Walker, In Search 370). Interestingly, this image of the "world" in Walker's wounded eye mirrors Hurston's vision of the horizon as a place of creative potential and opportunity.

Although Walker's initial reading of her wound was one of dismay at her loss of beauty (as she saw it), her wounding in fact turned out to be a positive thing in her life, particularly in the way that it provided an escape from the poverty she was born into. Walker recognized her wounding as the price of opportunity: "I used to have a dream in

which there was a bus coming down the road . . . and the bus driver would get out where I was waiting with my bag. He would hold his hand out for the fare--and I would put an eye in it" (Morgan and Steinem, Outrageous Acts 305). The epigraph of her book of poetry, Her Blue Body Everything We Know, is a quote by Albert Camus; it reveals Walker's feelings toward poverty and the wound which helped her escape it:

> *Poverty was not a calamity for me. It was always balanced by the richness of light . . . circumstances helped me. To correct a natural indifference I was placed halfway between misery and the sun. Misery kept me from believing that all was well under the sun, and the sun taught me that history wasn't everything. . . . I found in myself an invisible sun.* (Walker, Her Blue Body 6)

Just as Hurston's inability to travel physically to the horizon forced her to turn inward and develop her imagination, Walker's wound forced her to search for qualities other than beauty in herself. As Naomi Wolf points out in The Beauty Myth and as Walker herself discovered as a result of her wound, "Where modern women are growing, moving, and expressing their individuality as the myth has it, 'beauty' is by definition inert, timeless, and generic" (17).

Walker's wound forced Walker to recognize at an early age the transitory and elusive value of beauty as a means of defining the self; she was forced to discover other innate qualities by which she could define herself. Although she felt isolated and different because of her wound, Walker had a supportive community which included her family and especially her teachers, who "saved her from 'feeling alone; from worrying that the world she was stretching to find might not exist'" (Christian, "Alice Walker" 260-261). Her teachers encouraged her intellectual development by lending her books: "'Books became my world because the world I was in was very hard'" (Christian, "Alice Walker" 260-261). Walker dedicates the following poem to the "women who literally covered the holes in our walls with sunflowers":

There were women then
My mama's generation
Husky of voice--Stout of
Step
With fists as well as
Hands
How they battered down
Doors
And ironed
Starched white
Shirts
How they led
Armies
Headragged Generals
Across mined
Fields
Booby-trapped
Kitchens
To discover books
Desks
A place for us
How they knew what we
Must know
Without knowing a page
Of it
Themselves.
(Walker, In Search 242-243)

In addition to her own re-visioning of herself as an individual, there were monetary advantages to her wounding as well. Unlike Hurston, who was never able to escape the constrictions of poverty, Walker's injury made her eligible for and she was awarded a "rehabilitation scholarship" to attend Spelman, an elite African American women's college in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1961 (Christian, "Alice Walker" 260). Walker's scholarship enabled her to gain higher education whereas, without this money, high grades would not have been enough to get Walker to Spelman and on the road to success as a writer.

After two years at Spelman, Walker transferred to Sarah Lawrence where she received her degree in 1965. Two significant events--a traumatic abortion leading to an attempted suicide and a summer in Africa--inspired Walker to write the poems in her first book of poetry, Once (Walker, In Search 245-248). Walker's first writing success echoes Hurston's own in the sense that both artists found their voice when they looked within themselves, at their life experiences, and to their communities for their inspiration. After graduation, Walker worked for the Welfare Department in New York for a brief period before she followed the call of the Civil Rights Movement to Mississippi.

Walker was named the Breadloaf Writer's Conference Scholar for 1966 and the following year she received both the Merrill Writing Fellowship and the McDowell Colony Fellowship, all of which helped fund her writing. 1968 saw the publication of Once: Poems while she was a writer-in-residence and Black Studies teacher at Jackson State University, Mississippi. The following year she taught at Tougalo College and in 1970 published her first novel, The Third Life of Grange Copeland. Walker received the Radcliffe Institute Fellowship in 1971. In 1972 she taught literature at Wellesley College and the University of Massachusetts. Revolutionary Petunias: Poetry, published in 1973, won the National Book Award and the Lillian Smith Award from the Southern Regional Council. In 1974, Walker published Langston Hughes: American Poet, a juvenile biography, and she received the Rosenthal Foundation Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women, published in 1973.

Beginning in 1975, Walker held the post of contributing editor for Ms. Magazine. In 1976, she published her second novel, and in 1977 she received a Guggenheim Fellowship (Hurston won one, too) as well as her second McDowell Colony Fellowship. Two years later, in 1979, Walker edited I Love Myself When I Am

Laughing . . . and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader and published her third book of poems, Good Night, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning: Poetry.

Urged by the characters of the not-yet-written The Color Purple, Walker relocated outside of San Francisco, California. There she published You Can't Keep A Good Woman Down: Short Stories in 1981 to fund the writing of The Color Purple, which was published in 1982 and was nominated for a National Book Critics Circle Award. Walker was named distinguished writer in Afro-American Studies at Berkeley and taught literature as a "Fannie Hurst [one of Hurston's patrons] Professor of Literature" at Brandeis University. In 1983, Walker won the Pulitzer Prize for The Color Purple and published In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose. The following year, 1984, Walker published her fourth book of poetry, Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful. In 1988, Living By the Word: Selected Writings 1973-1987 was published and was followed in 1989 by Walker's fourth novel, the Temple of My Familiar.

Walker's most recent book of poetry, a compilation of her previous books of poetry and a few previously unpublished poems, was published in 1991 and is titled Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling Poems 1965-1990 Complete. A children's book, Finding the Green Stone, was published the same year. Her most recent novel is Possessing the Secret of Joy, published in 1992, the focus of which is female genital mutilation. Walker's interest in female genital mutilation led her to make a film, titled Warrior Marks, and to write a non-fiction book, titled Warrior Marks: Female Genital Mutilation and the Sexual Blinding of Women, about it with film-maker Pratibha Parmar, both in 1993. Walker followed these projects in 1996 with The Same River Twice: Honoring the Difficult, a compilation of autobiographical writings about her life and the writing of The Color Purple, Possessing the Secret of Joy, and Warrior Marks.

1997 saw the publication of Anything We Love Can Be Saved, a collection of essays and musings that is subtitled "A Writer's Activism." Langston Hughes, American Poet, her children's biography, was put into print in 1998.

As demonstrated in the above catalogue of her work, Walker is a prolific writer who publishes on an almost yearly basis. One might question her ability to do this because, like Hurston, she is African American, she is a woman, and she is (or was) poor; she has the same issues of race, gender, and class working against her as Hurston did. The differences between Hurston and Walker, however, are significant enough to warrant investigation.

Throughout her life, Hurston was forced to rely on individual white patronage to fund her education and to support her creative endeavors and that meant a loss of creative control over her work, a forced dependency on the charity of others. Walker, on the other hand, while born into the same circumstances, benefited from an injury, which led to a scholarship which allowed her to escape the usual restraints of class and race. Her prowess as a student and as a writer led to a successful academic career as a teacher which supported her literary career financially and allowed her to write, publish, and prosper from writing. This option was unavailable to Hurston, who worked brief stints as a substitute teacher only. Additionally, Walker was able to attain much more public, rather than individual, funding in the form of grants, scholarships, and awards. As Walker notes, writing as a career choice "requires a lot of free time. Requires a lot of mobility. Requires money, and, as Virginia Woolf put it so well, 'a room of one's own,' preferably one with a key and a *lock*" (Walker, In Search 37).

As if repaying a debt to Hurston for providing Walker with a model, Walker began the process of recovering Hurston's work, which had been out of print for approximately thirty years. As Walker explains,

> *We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away.* And if they are thrown away, it is our duty *as artists and as witnesses for the future* to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone. (Walker, In Search 92)

The recovery process included a review of criticism of Hurston's work. Early criticism of Hurston's work was largely negative and came from male critics, many of whom were white; Walker called their criticism "misleading, deliberately belittling, inaccurate, and generally irresponsible" (Walker, In Search 86). Robert Hemenway, author of Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography, was the first white critic Walker found who acknowledged Hurston's contribution to the African American literary tradition. Hemenway traced the course of Hurston's life and revealed that despite her success as a writer, Hurston died alone in poverty and was buried in an unmarked grave in Fort Pierce, Florida. Inspired by Hemenway's efforts to reestablish Hurston's name and work despite the harsh words of her other critics, Walker "began to fight for Zora and her work; for what I knew was good and must not be lost to us" (Walker, In Search 87). Walker placed a marker on Hurston's grave, located in an overgrown field in Florida, which read: "ZORA NEALE HURSTON/ 'A GENIUS OF THE SOUTH'/ NOVELIST FOLKLORIST/ ANTHROPOLOGIST/ 1901 [-] 1960" (Walker, In Search 107). In doing so, Walker acknowledged Hurston's respect for African folklore and cultural traditions. She also recognized, perhaps inadvertently, a "pervasive myth in the sections of Africa from which blacks were taken to North America" which "is that a proper burial is essential if the spirit of the deceased is to be at rest and bad luck is not to befall surviving relatives" (Stuckey, "Afro-American" 81). Walker recounts her journey to find Hurston's grave and place a marker on it in her essay "Looking for Zora."

The woman Walker found in her search was one of the most important preservers of African American culture and tradition, a "[f]olklorist, novelist, anthropologist, serious student of voodoo," essayist, autobiography, and "all-around black woman," as well as "a woman who wrote and spoke her mind" (Walker, In Search 11, 87). In terms

of her lifestyle, her opinions, and her own overwhelming self-confidence, Hurston was "before her time, in intellectual circles, in the life style she chose"; she wore brightly colored "African" clothing, and she embraced "the folk," those African Americans, usually poor and from the South, who had preserved African American folklore and traditions and who spoke in the African American common vernacular (Walker, In Search 89). Hurston's education in anthropology enabled her to recognize, study, and connect with her own culture, its idiomatic language, and her female ancestors, both biological and literary (via the oral storytelling tradition). Hurston's works reflect her attitudes toward African American life.

Now while Walker was able to look to Hurston as a model, nowhere in the research is there evidence that Hurston herself found a model in the African American literary world. As noted, Hurston's education in European mythology woke her to the fact that there was something lacking. It was not until her anthropological education under Boas at Barnard that she realized that the models she was looking for had been there all along. The folk and the folktales of her community of Eatonville were the connection to African American culture she had been looking for. In this less than clear statement, Hurston acknowledges the model her African American heritage provided: "Like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say" (Baker Workings, xiii). Hurston allowed her heritage to speak through her just as Walker considers herself a spiritual medium for her ancestors, including Hurston.

Walker dedicates The Color Purple "*[t]o the Spirit:* / Without whose assistance / Neither this book / Nor I / Would have been / Written" and ends the novel by saying, "I thank everybody in this book for coming"; Walker signs the latter note "A. W., author and medium" (Walker, Color 296). In a later poem she writes,

The old ones
visit me
in dreams
to thank me for
The Color Purple;

They tell me,
Daughter, it's
the best
you've ever done.

I can't tell you
how many rough
old hands
I've shook.
(Walker, Living By the Word 68)

Walker's connection with her literary and genealogical ancestors is so strong that she sees herself as a medium through which her characters, whose lives are grounded in actual African American history, can speak; through those characters, Walker is able to speak for the myriad numbers of African Americans whose historical, social, and political position as slaves and as the oppressed prevented them from expressing themselves, both creatively and otherwise.

Although it seems logical and natural today that Hurston and then Walker would have been able to draw on African traditions, oral storytelling, and African American idiomatic language, at the time, these characteristics were generally not valued by the African American literary community as it existed during the Harlem Renaissance. Nonetheless, Hurston dared to claim her heritage for what it was--her own--and proceeded to incorporate it into her work. Walker, using Hurston's work as her model, naturally followed suit and incorporated many of the same elements. These themes include: the African American community; the individual lives and personal growth, including sexual fulfillment, of African American women (and later, African women as

well); patriarchal economic oppression of women; and women's attainment of selfhood through connection with other women.

Just as Hurston accepted white patronage in order to do her life's work, researching and writing about African American folklore, Walker also risked criticism in order to write "the kinds of books she wants to read"; Walker follows her own interests and her own vision in her writing and that is what makes her successful (Walker, In Search 7). Additionally, when the subjects one wants to write about are outside the realm of what is commonly accepted and encouraged as literature, the writer faces an even greater challenge: "She must be her own model as well as the artist attending, creating, learning from, realizing the model, which is to say, herself" (Walker, In Search 8). Through this process, Walker learned that it is through this acknowledgment of one's ancestors, whether they be genealogical or literary, that *"the life we save is our own"* (Walker, In Search 14).

Chapter 2:

Their Eyes Were Watching God and The Color Purple

i love the way Janie Crawford

left her husbands the one who wanted
to change her into a mule
and the other who tried to interest her
in being a queen
a woman unless she submits is neither a mule
nor a queen
though like a mule she may suffer
and like a queen pace
the floor

(Walker, Her Blue Body 264)

It has been established that Alice Walker identifies and connects herself with her ancestors, both literary and genealogical, and that she is firmly entrenched within the female African American literary tradition. She is so entrenched because she was able to find female African American models in her mother, story-teller and gardener, and Zora Neale Hurston, anthropologist and writer of the Harlem Renaissance. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that in order for an African American woman writer to "participate in a tradition which had until recently offered women very little in the way of accurate representation or authorial canonization," she would have to "'actively seek[] a female precursor . . . who . . . proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible'" (Awkward, Inspiriting Influences 4). The reason the "'woman writer . . . searches for a female model [is] not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her "femininity," but because she must legitimize her own

rebellious endeavors'" (Awkward, Inspiriting Influences 7). Hurston's life and works are models of rebelliousness against the patriarchal order and she models the lives of her characters on her own life experience as an African American woman subject to the abuses of racism and sexism.

Although Hurston was not able to overcome these obstacles in her own life, she imagined and wrote about her characters achieving success against similar obstacles. The protagonist of Their Eyes Were Watching God, Janie Crawford, exhibits many of the same survival techniques used by Hurston in her own life and struggle against racism and sexism. As Michael Cooke notes,

> The more she is threatened, the more resourceful she becomes. The more she is deprived, the more self-sufficient she becomes. That inner stability and outer indominatability mark her off from anything that has gone before . . . The confinement of this phenomenon to women's hands is perhaps telling itself, showing the capacity to bear not just children, or the continuance of life, but to bear life itself. (Afro-American Literature, 72)

Alice Walker found Hurston's works to be such an inspiration that she once declared that if she were "[c]ondemned to a desert island for life, with an allotment of ten books to see [her] through," she would definitely take two of Hurston's: Mules and Men, a book of folklore, and Their Eyes Were Watching God, Hurston's best known novel and "one of the sexiest, most 'healthily' rendered heterosexual love stories in our literature" (Walker, In Search 88). Walker gives the latter book the highest praise possible: *"There is no book more important to me than this one"*; this is because the novel reveals African American people as "complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings" (Walker, In Search 86, 85). As an African American woman, she chose "the model, the example, of Janie Crawford" from Their Eyes Were Watching God, a book Walker asserts is "as necessary to [her] and to other women as air and water" (Walker, In Search 7).

Given that Their Eyes Were Watching God had such a profound effect upon Walker's life, it follows that the novel would also inform her own work. As Gilbert and

Gubar note, "the textual affinities between black women's work generally exist . . . as a function of black women writers' conscious acts of refiguration and revision of the earlier canonical texts" (Awkward, Inspiriting Influences 4). Walker draws on several characteristics and themes found in Their Eyes Were Watching God and uses them to achieve the same goal of selfhood in the life of her protagonist, Celie, just as they are used to achieve selfhood for Janie Crawford in Hurston's novel. These similar themes are: the individual lives and personal growth of women within the African American community; the expression of sexual desire in women; economic oppression by patriarchal forces; and the female protagonists' connection with a community of women as the means by which they are able to achieve selfhood and the right to speak for themselves within the community which formerly oppressed them as "the *mule[s]* of the world" (Walker, In Search 232).

Both Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Walker's The Color Purple are set in primarily African American communities. For this reason Philip criticized Walker for omitting in The Color Purple what she referred to as the "historical underpinnings" of African Americans living in a dominant white society in favor of telling the story of individuals and their triumphs over adversity (Frontiers 206). Although the oppression of African Americans as a race is not the focus of the novel, the historical background informs the entire work. Likewise, Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God, while often described as a romance novel, is also embedded in African American history.

African American history is very much the foundation of the world into which Janie Crawford is born. At the beginning of the novel the reader learns that Janie was raised by her grandmother, called "Nanny" (in the African American "mammy" tradition) by her and by the four white grandchildren raised with Janie on land owned by

a wealthy white family, the Washburns. Nanny is a former slave and acknowledges the limitations slavery places on an African American woman:

> "Ah was born back due in slavery so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman oughta be and to do. Dat's one of de hold-backs of slavery. But nothing can't stop you from wishin'. . . . Ah didn't want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and Ah didn't want mah daughter used dat way neither." (Hurston, Their Eyes 15)

Despite her desire for freedom, Nanny's understanding of the African American woman's role is clear:

> "So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see." (Hurston, Their Eyes 14)

This definition of the African American woman is certainly evident in Nanny's life. She was raped and impregnated by the slave master and then abused by the master's wife when the master went off to fight in the civil war. After giving birth to a child with ""gray eyes and yaller hair"" and threatened with a serious whipping and possible death, Nanny escaped with her child into the swamp, risking snakebite and recapture, and emerged after the civil war ended and slavery was abolished (Hurston, Their Eyes 17).

After emancipation, Nanny had no other option but to continue doing the work she did as a slave and so she gained employment with the Washburns and transplanted her dreams of freedom from herself to her daughter, Leafy:

> "Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin' on high, but they wasn't no pulpit for me. Freedom found me wid a baby daughter in mah arms, so Ah said Ah'd take a broom and a cook-pot and throw up a highway through de wilderness for her. She would expound what Ah felt." (Hurston, Their Eyes 15)

Emancipation from slavery did not guarantee a pulpit for African American women to speak from, not to mention the personal freedom which would enable Leafy to become a teacher. With the help of Mrs. Washburn, Leafy gained an education but was raped by

the schoolteacher who, when he returned later to propose marriage, was chased away by the sheriff and his hounds. Traumatized, Leafy "'took to drinkin' likker and stayin' out nights'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 18-19). After Leafy disappeared, Nanny transferred, yet again, her dreams of a pulpit from which African American women could speak to Leafy's daughter, Janie: "'Ah said Ah'd save de text for you'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 16). This is the historical foundation of Janie Crawford's life and Nanny's views (based on her experience) of the African American woman's role in a society impinge upon the possibilities and options available to Janie in her life.

Likewise, the history of racism in the South underlies the circumstances Celie's father found himself in as a former slave who was lynched while trying to attain some financial independence through free enterprise. Celie's father was a "well-to-do farmer" who opened a general store and a small blacksmith's shop. When white merchants felt they were losing all the African American business to him, they burned down the store and lynched him, with no legal recourse laid against them. The effect on the family was disastrous; Celie's mother went mad, but, out of financial necessity, married the man Celie knew as "Pa" and had more children until she died when Celie was fourteen (Walker, Color 180-181). Meanwhile, Celie was the victim of rape and of (what she believed was) incest at the hands of her "Pa"; these rapes resulted in the births of two children, Adam and Olivia, and the removal of these children from their mother's arms.

It is apparent in the background and family life of Walker and Hurston's protagonists, Janie and Celie, that African American history against the larger backdrop of white society is important. Born a slave and forced to work like a mule all her life, Nanny was not able to gain access to the pulpit she wished to speak from. Voiceless, she dreamed of putting her child and then her grandchild behind the pulpit to speak for her. Similarly, had Celie's father not been lynched as a result of white racism, her mother might have kept her sanity and the children might have been raised in an economically

stable home which supported the development of the children's self-esteem. Instead, Celie has some serious issues to contend with: self-worth, self-confidence, and acceptance of her sexuality.

The theme of economic oppression is significant. Just as writing requires time, money, and "'a room of one's own,'" so financial independence is important to the process of self-discovery (Walker, In Search 37). While she was not, perhaps, thinking of self-discovery as a goal to be sought after, Nanny was certainly aware of the importance of financial independence when she chided Janie for allowing herself to be "lacerated" with a kiss from Johnny Taylor:

> "'Ah don't want no trashy nigger, no breath-and-britches, lak Johnny Taylor usin' yo' body to wipe his foots on. . . . Ah wanted yuh to school out and pick from a higher bush and a sweeter berry.'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 12-13)

In choosing Logan Killicks, owner of sixty acres of land and the only organ in town belonging to colored folks, Nanny felt she was providing a better life for her granddaughter. Janie had a different idea of how marriage should be.

Janie's vision of marriage is intimately connected to nature and, in particular, with Janie's attachment to the blossoming pear tree in her backyard:

> She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. . . . Oh to be a pear tree--*any* tree in bloom! With kissing bees singing of the beginning of the world! She was sixteen. She had glossy leaves and bursting buds and she wanted to struggle with life but it seemed to elude her. Where were the singing bees for her? Nothing on the place nor in her grandma's house answered her. She searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the front steps and then went on down to the front

> gate and leaned over to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made. (Hurston, Their Eyes 10-11)

Janie's sexual awakening, as described metaphorically in the blossoming of the pear tree, is embodied initially in Janie's vision of future personal happiness in the form of Johnny Taylor as he comes up the road; he is covered in the golden pollinated dust and Janie kisses him only to be caught by Nanny. Once Nanny has had her say regarding Janie's future with Johnny, Janie admits that she does not love Johnny.

Janie does not want to be a mule, according to Nanny's doctrine of African American womanhood, but not having experienced marriage--the only option offered to her by her grandmother--she wants to know whether it will end the "cosmic loneliness" she feels (Hurston, Their Eyes 20). Foreshadowing her future disappointment in her marriage with Logan Killicks, Janie thinks, but is unable to express the thought to Nanny, that "[t]he vision of Logan Killicks was desecrating the pear tree" (Hurston, Their Eyes 13).

Having made such a strong connection with nature and with her own sexual desires, she cannot help but be disappointed with her marriage to Logan; she assumes, mistakenly, that "husbands and wives always loved each other, and that was what marriage meant. It was just so. . . . She wouldn't be lonely anymore" (Hurston, Their Eyes 20). Janie is neither impregnated nor beaten "already," as Nanny expects (given her own history), but Logan's attitude towards Janie changes as he tries to get her to tote wood and suggests that she could handle a mule when ploughing time arrives (Hurston, Their Eyes 26). Having experienced a real marriage, Janie is finally able to verbalize her expectations of marriage to Nanny: "'Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 23). When she realizes that "marriage [does] not make love," she returns to her former pastime of looking "up the road towards way off" (Hurston, Their Eyes 24). Janie moves from childhood into

womanhood with her rejection of her marriage to Logan and the failure of her vision of marriage.

Janie's decision to leave Logan (regardless of whether Jody Starks was waiting for her or not) puts a "bee [in] her bloom" and calls for the creation of new language: "Her old thoughts were going to come in handy now, but new words would have to be made and said to fit them" (Hurston, Their Eyes 31). Jody Starks "did not represent sun-up and pollen and blooming trees" for Janie, "but he spoke for far horizon" and for "change and chance" (Hurston, Their Eyes 28). Jody aims to be a "big voice" in Eatonville and, fittingly, prefaces most of his sentences with the phrase "I god," indicating exactly how highly he thinks of himself (Hurston, Their Eyes 27). He plans to treat Janie like a "pretty doll-baby" by putting her on a pedestal, and while this sounds attractive to Janie, she does not realize that he plans to be a "big voice" over her as well. She is essentially bought and paid for in Jody's vision of what marriage brings to one's economic and social value in a community.

Her new husband Jody has no intention of giving her a chance to speak: "It must have been the way Joe spoke out without giving her a chance to say anything one way or another that took the bloom off of things" (Hurston, Their Eyes 41). Janie's privileges as the wife of the "big voice" soon become a straight-jacket for her as he forbids her to participate in the front porch story telling sessions and he insists she cover her beautiful hair with a head-rag (Hurston, Their Eyes 48). Hurston's analogy for Janie's marriage to Jody is apparent in the story of how Jody saved Matt's mule from being baited, only to tie it up in front of the store, feed it, and wait for it to die. When Jody "frees" the mule, Janie gets her first chance to speak publicly: "'Freein' dat mule makes uh mighty big man outa you. . . . You got uh town so you freed uh mule. You have tuh have power to free things and dat makes you lak uh king uh something" (Hurston, Their Eyes 55). Hambo acknowledges Janie's ability to speak but does not speak to her: "'Yo wife is uh born

orator, Starks'" (Hurston, Th[eir Eyes 55). Interestingly, Janie's speech silences Jody: "Joe bit down hard on his cigar [and beamed all around, but he never said a word" (Hurston, Their Eyes 55). When the [mule finally dies, Jody forbids her to go to the dragging out (of the mule's body) and d[oes not understand her resentment at not being allowed to participate in a community [event:

> She wasn't e[ven appreciative of his efforts and she had plenty cause to be. Here he was [just pouring honor all over her; building a high chair for her to sit in and [overlook the world and she here pouting over it! (Hurston, Their Eyes 5[8-59)

Despite his big plans to e[levate her to a high chair, he remains sexist and begins to verbally abuse Janie: "'Som[ebody got to think for women and chillun and chickens and cows. I god, they sho don['t think none theirselves'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 67). Janie speaks up for herself in re[sponse--"'Ah knows uh few things, and womenfolks thinks sometimes too!"--but Jody['s ultimate goal is Janie's submission (Hurston, Their Eyes 67). For the most part, sh[e acquiesces to Jody's demands, "taking the easy way away from a fuss" to keep him an[iable (Hurston, Their Eyes 59).

It is not until Jody [begins to physically abuse Janie that something in Janie "fell off the shelf inside her" (H[urston, Their Eyes 68). Janie has a moment of insight when she sees "her image of Jod[y tumbled down and shattered" and realizes that Jody was not "the flesh and blood figure[of her dreams" but rather "something she had grabbed up to drape her dreams over" (H[urston, Their Eyes 68). Janie recognizes finally that Jody is not the vision she saw com[ing up the road as she lay under the pear tree:

> She had no [more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man, neither any glisteni[ng young fruit where the petals used to be. She found that she had a host [of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions sh[e had never let Jody know about. Things packed up in parts of her heart wh[ere he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man s[he had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly sh[e knew how not to mix them. (Hurston, Their Eyes 68)

Janie's recognition of the separateness of her inner and outer selves enables her to find her own voice within the community, despite her husband's efforts to silence her. As Barbara Johnson notes in her essay "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in Their Eyes Were Watching God":

> Janie's acquisition of the power of voice thus grows not out of her identity but out of her division into inside and outside. Knowing how not to mix them is knowing that articulate language requires the co-presence of two distinct poles, not their collapse into oneness. . . . Far from being an expression of Janie's new wholeness or identity as a character, Janie's increasing ability to speak grows out of her ability not to mix inside with outside, not to pretend that there is no difference, but to assume and articulate the incompatible forces involved in her own division. (49-50)

In other words, in order for Janie to transgress her position in society as an African American woman, that is, as a "*mule* of the world," she has to recognize her inside and outside selves and speak about them (Walker, In Search 232).

Janie began to be "petal open" about her inside emotions and dared to speak on the front porch with the men. Hurston cites Joe Clark's store in the real Eatonville as "the heart and spring of the town," the place where the men gathered to gossip and hold "'lying' session[s]" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 48). Although the store is a place of male discourse, it is the women who have mastery over language, albeit not necessarily on the store porch. For example, in the real Eatonville, Hurston's father "would start to put up an argument that would have been terrific on the store porch, but Mama would pitch in with a single word or a sentence and mess it all up" (Hurston, Dust Tracks 69). As Their Eyes Were Watching God is a semi-autobiographical novel and draws on Hurston's Eatonville experiences, Janie speaks out in a similar fashion when she contradicts Jody's public claim that he is "I god." She claims female power over language when she declares,

> "Sometimes God gits familiar wid us womenfolks too and talks His inside business. He told me how surprised He was 'bout y'all turning out so

> smart after Him makin' yuh different; and how surprised y'all is goin' tuh be if you ever find out you don't know half as much 'bout us as you think you do. It's so easy to make yo'self out God Almighty when you ain't got nothin' tuh strain against but women and chickens." (Hurston, Their Eyes 70-71)

Janie's speech implies that women are men's equals--at least, if not better than equals in God's eyes.

Janie's sense of separation remains strong as she watches her outside self, which Hurston describes as the "shadow of herself," which implies that it is less substantial than her inside self, "going about tending store and prostrating itself before Jody, while all the time she herself sat under a shady tree with the wind blowing through her hair and her clothes" (Hurston, Their Eyes 73).

Terrified of his own aging body, Jody becomes more verbally abusive towards Janie as if "the more ridicule he poured over her body," the more he would divert public "attention away from his own" (Hurston, Their Eyes 74). Finally, Janie has enough of his abuse and speaks up against him, in public, in the middle of his store. Janie points out the disparity she finds in the fact that the men are permitted to criticize women for aging, while women are not supposed to say a word about the same process taking place in the men; Janie says to her aging husband Jody Starks,

> "Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' but den ah ain't no old woman neither. Ah reckon Ah looks mah age too. But Ah'm uh woman every inch of me, and Ah know it. . . . Humph! Talkin' 'bout *me* lookin' old! When you pull down yo' britches, you look lak de change uh life." . . . Janie had robbed him of his illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish, which was terrible. (Hurston, Their Eyes 75)

After Jody's death, she sends her face--her outside self--to the funeral while "herself"--her inner self-- "went rollicking with the springtime across the world" (Hurston, Their Eyes 85).

In addition, she is preparing finally to make her "great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they

find her" (Hurston, Their Eyes 85). It is at this point in her life that Janie finally expresses her hatred for her grandmother who "had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon--for no matter how far a person can go the horizon is still way beyond you--and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her grandmother's neck tight enough to choke her" (Hurston, Their Eyes 85).

In Janie, Hurston creates a heroine who survives both her husband's efforts to silence her and the oppression inherited from her female ancestors and perpetuated by both men and women within the community. Janie finds her own voice through her identification with people who have achieved her vision of horizon and she keeps her initial vision of the blossoming pear tree alive.

Janie's vision of the pear blossom and her journey to the horizon are maintained throughout the novel and come to fruition in her love relationship with Tea Cake. To Janie, Tea Cake

> looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom--a pear blossom in the spring. He seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took. Spices hung about him. He was a glance from God. (Hurston, Their Eyes 101-102)

Coming to terms with her grandmother's repressive influence on her life, Janie tells Phoeby, authorized to speak on Janie's behalf to the community, that her relationship with Tea Cake "'ain't no business proposition, and no race after property and titles. Dis is uh love game. Ah done lived Grandma's way, now Ah means tuh live mine'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 108). This "love game" is a possibility now because Janie's inheritance has alleviated all economic concerns which would have been an issue formerly.

An independent woman finally, Janie's life changes considerably as a result of her relationship with Tea Cake. She begins doing and learning things formerly done and known only by men: playing checkers, telling stories, and hunting. She learns to trust

Tea Cake when he tells her, "'Nobody else on earth kin hold uh candle tuh you, baby. You got de keys to de kingdom,'" and, as a result of her "self-crushing love" for Tea Cake, her "soul crawled out from its hiding place" (Hurston, Their Eyes 104, 122).

The phrase "self-crushing love" is significant because it foreshadows the outcome of Janie and Tea Cake's relationship. Janie knows that Tea Cake cannot fill Jody Starks' place in the store and, moreover, that he is not the type to stay in one place and settle down. So Janie uproots herself from her community, sells the store, marries Tea Cake, and goes off with him to "'start all over in Tea Cake's way'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 108). Tea Cake's "way" is a wild life of travel, meeting new people, partying, drinking, gambling, and the occasional temporary job to make money, all of which is very exciting and new to Janie's "strange eyes" (Hurston, Their Eyes 123). Janie and Tea Cake go "'on de muck'" together in the Everglades of Florida to do seasonal work and to make "'money and fun and foolishness'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 122).

Foolishness results in a physical fight, however, when Tea Cake's behavior with the flirtatious Nunkie makes Janie jealous and then angry when he denies he was involved with Nunkie: "'You done hurt mah heart, now you come wid uh lie tuh bruise mah ears!'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 131). Later, Tea Cake's ears and ego are bruised when he overhears Mrs. Turner, an African American woman who thinks her Caucasian features make her better than her peers, suggest that Janie marry her brother. In addition, Mrs. Turner insults African Americans as a race and himself in particular and Janie says little to defend either. Rather than confronting Janie about what he has heard, he resorts to abuse:

> Before the week was over he had whipped Janie. Not because her behavior justified his jealousy, but it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. No brutal beating at all. He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss. (Hurston, Their Eyes 140)

Janie may hold the "keys to the kingdom," as Tea Cake puts it, but Tea Cake is the king of that *king*dom--a stereotypical patriarchal marriage--and rules over Janie with his fists. He brags to Sop-de-Bottom that, "'Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be. Dat's de kind uh wife she is and Ah love her for it. . . . Ah didn't beat Janie 'cause *she* done nothin'. Ah beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss. Ah set in de kitchen one day and heard dat woman tell mah wife Ah'm too black fuh her'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 141). Tea Cake's "awful fear" of losing Janie is unfounded, however, as she still loves him and has no regrets: "'If you kin see de light at daybreak, you don't keer if you die at dusk. It's so many people never seen de light at all. Ah wuz fumblin' round and God opened de door'" (Hurston, Their Eyes 151).

Just as Janie acknowledges that she has seen "de light," the sky darkens, the wind begins to blow, and a hurricane develops that sets the Everglades awash in raging water. During the storm, Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog; a visit to the doctor is suggested, but the wound heals, and it is not until a month later that the symptoms of rabies begin to appear in Tea Cake and he is diagnosed by a doctor. Interestingly, the impetus for Tea Cake's final attack on Janie is a fit of jealousy--and his "awful fear"; the disease has taken over his body. To save her own life, she shoots him with the rifle just as he takes a shot at her with the pistol; he dies sinking his teeth into the flesh of her arm.

Over the course of her trial for Tea Cake's murder, Janie faces, not death, but the "lying thoughts" of the African American audience at the trial: "They were there with their tongues cocked and loaded, the only real weapon left to weak folks. The only killing tool they are allowed to use in the presence of white folks" (Hurston, Their Eyes 176). The African American men in the courtroom see themselves as the "*mule[s]* of the world" because they interpret the difference between the white oppression of African American men and women to be gender, rather than race, related (Walker, In Search 232). In this case, they believe it would be a non-issue for whites if an African American

man killed another African American man, while an African American woman killing an African American man elevates the woman "into utter powerfulness by killing a black man" (DuPlessis 1990, 104). Perhaps this is why the white jury, as well as a group of white women, form a "protecting wall" around Janie which results in her acquittal and subsequent freedom (Hurston, Their Eyes 179). The "lying thoughts" of the African Americans who do not understand the situation (as Janie explains it to the jury) dissipate after the trial and her acquittal and she is accepted once again into the community as a wealthy widowed woman.

Having gone Tea Cake's way until his death, Janie returns to Eatonville with a new perspective. For Janie, Tea Cake represented something other than the husband and lover he was; this is seen in her early description of him as a spirited horse she releases to the outside air to "leap forth and mount to the sky on a wind" (Hurston, Their Eyes 103). After his death, the spirit of the horse remains and her vision of marriage is fulfilled in the final pages of the novel:

> Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sign flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (Hurston, Their Eyes 183-184)

The image of the horse reveals that Janie's experience of life and love is ongoing and encompasses more than her relationships with men. She tells Phoeby to communicate on her behalf to the community that "love ain't somethin' lak uh grindstone dat's de same thing everywhere and do de same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea. It's a movin' thing, but still and all, it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and it's different with every shore" (Hurston, Their Eyes 182). This comment implies that Janie's

experience of life and love will be different yet again with her return to Eatonville. Most notable, however, is the fact that Janie, having completed her quest for selfhood, returns to the community of Eatonville to share her experiences with another woman, Phoeby, who will speak on her behalf to the rest of the community.

Able to imagine and write about Janie as an active and experienced romantic heroine, Hurston does not feel free to represent herself as a lover in the same light. In the chapter titled "Love" in Dust Tracks on a Road, Hurston downplays her knowledge in matters of love and romance:

> What do I really know about love? I have had some experiences and feel fluent enough for my own satisfaction. . . . But pay no attention to what I say about love, for as I said before, it may not mean a thing. . . . Maybe the old Negro folk-rhyme tells all there is to know:
> "Love is a funny thing; Love is a blossom;
> If you want your finger bit, poke it at a possum."
> (Hurston, Dust Tracks 203, 214)

Hemenway's apt observation on Hurston's considerable skill at employing rhetorical strategies (such as the above non-admission of knowledge about love) that enable her to conceal more than she reveals is reinforced by Hurston's own admission that "she did not want to write the book at all because 'it is too hard to reveal one's inner self'" (Washington, "Zora Neale Hurston" 20). However, it is apparent that she found satisfaction with her writing and with her life experiences, despite their hardships: "But already, I have touched the four corners of the horizon, for from hard searching it seems to me that tears and laughter, love and hate make up the sum of life" (Howard, "Zora Neale Hurston" 145).

Hurston's attempt to reveal her inner self in Dust Tracks on a Road is a reflection of the assertion she makes at the beginning of her semi-autobiographical novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God:

> Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Hurston, Their Eyes 1)

The thing that Janie wants to remember is that Tea Cake was "a bee for her bloom;" she chooses to forget that her relationships with Logan Killicks, Jody Starks, and Tea Cake were abusive. Janie's experience and self-knowledge give her the strength to continue her life without Tea Cake: "Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got to go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh themselves" (Hurston, Their Eyes 183).

Just as Janie's life experience teaches her about herself, Celie, the protagonist of Alice Walker's The Color Purple, also "find[s] out about livin'" for herself through her experiences as a economically struggling African American woman in the South. Like Nanny, a former slave whose ability to fulfill her dreams were hampered by racism and sexism, Celie's family history, rooted in the historical truth of slavery, put in motion a series of events which made it impossible for Celie to be able to fulfill her dreams. Walker herself grew up hearing stories of lynchings that had occurred in the not too distant past and incorporated this history into Celie's family background. Celie's biological father was lynched for running a successful store catering to African American patrons; the white man who ran the only other store in the area lost business to him and, after falsely accusing Celie's father of raping a white woman, lynched him. The identity of her biological father is kept from Celie and she grows up thinking Alphonso, her mother's second husband, is actually her father. She is traumatized by Alphonso's repeated raping of her body when Celie's mother refuses to have sex with him; this is trauma is exacerbated by the false belief that Alphonso is her father. Celie's mother dies "screaming and cussing" at her because she's pregnant and slower in doing all the household chores (Walker, Color 3).

Celie's pregnancies mean that, despite Nettie's protests that Celie is smart and enjoys school, Celie's education is cut short. Alphonso takes Celie's children from her (she believes Alphonso has killed the first child and sold the second) and marries her off to Albert, whom Celie refers to as Mr.__. Forbidden by his father to marry Shug Avery, the only woman Albert loves and the cause of Albert's first wife's death, Albert settles for Celie when Alphonso refuses to allow his marriage to Nettie, Celie's pretty younger sister and Albert's first choice. Albert accepts Celie because she cannot get pregnant again, because she can cook and take care of Albert's children from his first marriage, because she has a dowry of a cow and linen, and because "she can work like a man" (Walker, Color 9).

As Albert's wife, she is subject to even more abuse. On her wedding day she is attacked by Albert's oldest son who is still grieving for his dead mother and does not want a new one:

> He pick up a rock and laid my head open. The blood run all down tween my breasts. His daddy say Don't *do* that! But that's all he say. He got four children . . . The girls hair ain't been comb since their mammy died. . . . So after I bandage my head best I can and cook dinner . . . I start trying to untangle hair. (Walker, Color 13)

When Nettie runs away from home to escape Alphonso, who is planning to rape her as well, she comes to stay with Celie, only to be subjected to Albert's sexual advances too. Albert punishes Celie for protecting Nettie by sending Nettie away. Celie still manages to look out for Nettie by giving her the name of the reverend whose wife Celie saw with baby Olivia in the store because "[s]he the only woman I even seen with money" (Walker, Color 19).

As in Their Eyes Were Watching God, economics are key in The Color Purple. Money equals power and it offers Nettie an opportunity to escape the inherited abuses of her life. The Reverend Samuel and his wife Corrine offer her a job doing missionary and

teaching work in Africa with them and Celie's two babies. Albert, out of spitefulness, hides all Nettie's letters to Celie until Celie supposes she is dead and feels that she herself is dead also, as a result of her life of abuse: "[Albert] beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don't never hardly beat them. . . . I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man" (Walker, Color 23). It is Celie's connection with nature through her identification with trees that signifies the beginning of her transformation, just as Janie first began to look towards the horizon following her identification with the pear tree.

At this point, Celie is still following the patriarchal prescriptions for her life imposed on her by her upbringing, environment, and, above all, by her marriage to an abusive partner. Not able to write to her sister Nettie, she writes to God because her step-father ordered her not to reveal the sexual abuse to which he subjected her to anyone but God; he ensures her complicit silence by adding the threat of matriarchal guilt: "*It'd kill your mammy*" (Walker, Color 1). Celie is naive in the sense that she knows no other way than what she has been taught via patriarchal culture. For example, Celie is jealous of Sofia's (Celie's stepson Harpo's wife) ability to fend for herself and has no outlet for her unexpressed anger about her own abusive situation. She tells Harpo, Albert's son, to rule over Sofia with his fists because men have always ruled over her. Celie begins to understand the importance of sisterhood and support within a community of women when Sofia confronts her about her advice to Harpo (Walker, Color 37-44). Sofia forgives Celie and they begin the creative work of making a "Sister's Choice" quilt together.

Life begins to change in significant ways with the arrival of Shug Avery, a blues singer and Albert's sometime mistress. Celie's first glimmerings of sexual interest and lesbian awakening occur when she sees a photo of Shug before they meet:

> The most beautiful woman I ever saw. . . . I see her there in furs. Her face rouge. Her hair like somethin tail. She grinning with her foot up on somebody motorcar. Her eyes serious tho. Sad some. . . . now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress to kill, whirling and laughing. (Walker, Color 7)

When they finally meet, Shug treats her as Albert does, saying, "You sure *is* ugly" (Walker, Color 48). Celie's initial attraction to Shug holds, however, and Celie begins to nurse Shug back to health. Celie is aroused by the sight of Shug in the bathtub: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man" (Walker, Color 51). Celie's act of love in caring for the ailing Shug is reciprocated with the gift of "Miss Celie's Song" which Shug says Celie helped "scratch out of [her] head" (Walker, Color 55).

A more important gift, however, is Shug's introduction of Celie to her own physical body "which was taken from her by men--first by her brutal stepfather and then passed on to her husband, Albert" (Ross, "Celie in the Looking Glass" 70). In a frank discussion about sex, Shug learns that, despite having given birth to two babies, Celie is entirely naive about her own body. Celie looks at her blankly when Shug describes the orgasmic experience of sex:

> Listen, she say, right down there in your pussy is a little button that gits real hot when you do you know what with somebody. It gits hotter and hotter and then it melt. That the good part. But other parts good too . . . (Walker, Color 81)

Shug asserts that Celie is still a virgin, despite having had intercourse with a man and given birth to two children, by virtue of the fact that she has never had an orgasm. This redefinition undermines and threatens "patriarchal control over women's bodies, in that it places priority not on penetration, and thus on the social mechanism for guaranteeing ownership of children, but on enjoyment, making the woman's own response the index of her 'experience'" (Hite, "Romance, Marginality, Matrilineage" 266).

Shug directs Celie to look at her own genitalia for the first time and to admire its beauty:

> I lie back on the bed and haul up my dress. Yank down my bloomers. Stick the looking glass tween my legs. Ugh. All that hair. Then my pussy lips be black. Then inside look like a wet rose. . . .
>
> I look at her and touch [my clitoris] with my finger. A little shiver go through me. Nothing much. But just enough to tell me this the right button to mash. Maybe. (Walker, Color 82)

Shug's gift of the revelation and repossession of Celie's own body is the first step in Celie's development as a whole, individuated, and creative African American woman. As Daniel Ross notes,

> To make a desire for selfhood possible, Celie must take a new perspective on her own body. Rather than defining herself in terms of fragmentation or lack, she must learn to define herself synecdochically, seeing *part* of her body, specifically her genitalia, as a sufficient symbol of herself as a whole. ("Celie in the Looking Glass" 446)

Celie's revaluation of her body as "the site of self-awareness and self-esteem" reaches its zenith when Shug and Celie make love to each other: "Us kiss and kiss till us can't hardly kiss no more. Then us touch each other. . . . Then I feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth. After a while, I act like a little lost baby too" (Byerman, "Desire" 321; Walker, Color 118). Reborn through this orgasmic experience and assured of her value as a physical body, Celie begins to assert her value in other areas, including her marriage to Albert. Celie no longer ignores or annihilates her own body as in the past when she imagined herself a tree so as not to feel Albert's assaults on her person.

Celie's rejection of her role as "'the *mule* of the world'" within patriarchal society leads to a growing connection between Celie and other women, including Nettie (through her letters), Shug, Sofia, and Mary Agnes (Walker, In Search 232). Whereas before, Celie felt isolated in her abuse just as Janie did before other options were presented to Janie, Celie's identification with other women enables her to "break free

from the masculine prohibition against speech and to join a community of women, thus freeing herself from dependence on and subjection to male brutality" (Ross, "Celie in the Looking Glass" 71).

Shug helps Celie find Nettie's letters which Albert has hidden from her. Strengthened by her reconnection with her sister, Celie defies her step-father's injunction to "tell nobody but God," rejects the patriarchal Father-God of her childhood, and begins addressing her letters to Nettie (Walker, Color 1). Celie says, "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgitful and lowdown. . . . He big and old and tall and graybearded and white" (Walker, Color 199, 201). Rather than reject religion altogether, Shug offers Celie a pantheistic concept of God and religion that Celie embraces because it embraces her as an important part of the universe:

> God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. . . . I believe God is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found It. . . . My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day . . . it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. (Walker, Color 203)

Shug informs Celie that if God is to be found in everything, then people "can't walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it;" Shug's, and Walker's, concept of God is all-inclusive (Walker, Color 202-203).

Shug's plan of action for herself and her advice to other women is to "git man off [her] eyeball" so women can begin to see the truth:

> Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end if it, tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock. (Walker, Color 202)

n one's eyeball refers to the male power structure, particularly
The idea of having a mar makes all women, especially African American women, the
that of Caucasians, whic explained in chapter one of this thesis (Walker, In Search
"*mule[s]* of the world," ire up elements of nature to use in her effort to "git man off
232). Celie begins to co t she is, in fact, very angry to discover that man--in particular,
[her] eyeball" and finds t her eyeball: "I hardly pray at all. Every time I conjure up a
the men in her life--is o alker, Color 204).
rock, I throw it. Amen" (ats murderous thoughts and desires to kill Albert to revenge

Angry, Celie con er over the years when she discovers Albert has been hiding
his abusive treatment of All day long I act just like Sofia. I stutter. I mutter to myself. I
Nettie's letters from her: azy for Mr.__ blood. In my mind, he falling dead every which
stumble about the house , I can't speak (Walker, Color 125). She even considers slicing
a way. By time night con zor while she shaves his face. Also, her anger toward Albert
Albert's throat with the r Shug, but Shug suggests that she channel her anger into a
stifles her sexual desire affirming activity: sewing. Shug's suggestion that Celie begin
creative, positive, and se herself subverts traditional male and female dress codes and,
sewing a pair of pants f ke sense of it: "What I need pants for? I say. I ain't no man"
initially, Celie can not m material for the first pair comes from an old army uniform
(Walker, Color 152). Th husband, Jack--an interesting gender reversal as that first pair
formerly worn by Odess niform in her efforts to get "man off her eyeball"; her new
becomes Celie's battle er from going crazy: "A needle and not a razor in my hand, I
creative endeavors save think" (Walker, Color 1:).

Celie's sewing ges her the potential for complete economic independence from
Albert and enables her leave the marriage. The next step in self-discovery for Celie,
having already claime her physical body and written language, is to reclaim oral
language which she doe in a dramatic scene where Shug announces that she and Celie

are leaving for Memphis together. In a scene reminiscent of the scene when Janie Crawford informs Jody Starks that he looks "lak de change uh life," Celie finds her voice, her "killing tool," and tells Albert as well as the other men at the table her truth--a truth that silences Albert (Hurston, Their Eyes 75, 176):

> You a lowdown dog is what's wrong, I say. It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need. . . . You took my sister Nettie away from me, I say. And she was the only person love me in the world. . . . But Nettie and my children coming home soon, I say. And when she do, all us together gon whup your ass. . . . I never ast you for nothing. Not even for your sorry hand in marriage. (Walker, Color 207-209)

Celie also speaks to Harpo on behalf of Sofia, which enables Sofia to speak up for herself. In addition, Celie's speech empowers Mary Agnes to claim her own name and to leave Harpo to follow her dream to sing.

The next day when the women leave for Memphis, it is apparent that Albert has not yet realized that he no longer has power over her; he says, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothin at all" (Walker, Color 213). Celie curses--conjures--Albert, using her newfound power of speech and draws strength from her connection with nature:

> I curse you, I say. . . . Until you do right by me, I say, everything you even dream about will fail. I give it to him straight, just like it come to me. And it seem to come to me from the trees. . . . Every lick you hit me you will suffer twice, I say. Then I say, You better stop talking because all I'm telling you ain't coming just from me. Look like when I open my mouth the air rush in and shape words. . . . A dust devil flew up on the porch between us, fill my mouth with dirt. The dirt say, Anything you do to me, already done to you. (Walker, Color 213-214)

Without the interference of "man on the eyeball," Celie is able to connect directly with nature and is able to draw strength from it.

Settled in Shug's house in Memphis and proprietor of Folkspants, Unlimited, Celie continues to write letters to Nettie: "I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got

money, friends, and time. And you alive and be home soon. With our children" (Walker, Color 222). Soon afterward, Celie inherits her mother's house when her step-father, whom she knew as her father, dies. Now Celie has complete financial independence. Additionally, Celie's curse on Albert comes to pass, and Albert eventually realizes that "meanness kill[s];" he begins to take care of himself and the house after living in squalor for a time, he returns the remainder of Nettie's letters to Celie, and they forge a platonic friendship from the remains of an abusive marriage. As a result of her reconnection with Nettie, Celie is able to teach Albert that the gender roles they have always subscribed to are not fixed; Celie teaches Albert to sew and he begins to make shirts to go with Celie's pants.

Celie's final letter reveals a sense of completion: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear tree, dear sky, dear peoples, Dear Everything" (Walker, Color 292). The culmination of the novel is Celie's reunion with her estranged family: Nettie and her two adopted children, Olivia and Adam. She also welcomes Nettie's husband, Samuel, and Adam's wife, Tashi. Ultimately, Celie's life parallels that of Janie Crawford in Their Eyes Were Watching God. As seen, both women speak in--and their authors claim--the African American vernacular. Both women begin their lives as poor African American women from the South (much like Hurston and Walker) and are subject to similar racial and sexual abuses arising out of the history of slavery. Both are treated by men as "*mule[s]* of the world" and marry these men, yet their connection with nature and with other women empowers them to reject their status as "mules" and to reject their marriages to men who treat them as such. Walker's revisioning of the storm in Their Eyes Were Watching God as the anger Celie feels as an oppressed and abused African American woman adds a new twist to Hurston's original plot as it makes the possibility of an alternative sexuality acceptable for Celie and beyond reproach from the men in Celie's life. Celie submitted for a time in her relationships with her step-father, Alphonso, and her husband, Albert,

but eventually, "like a queen/ pace[d] the floor" and gained life experience only to learn that she is a complete, individual, and valued person who plays a significant role in nature. Janie's visions of the pear tree and the horizon, representing sexual fulfillment and the attainment of selfhood respectively, are realized as a result of her rejection of patriarchal rule as represented by her relationships with men and through her return to a community of women. Likewise, Celie's attainment of selfhood and sexual self-possession is the result of her connection with the women in her community; she rejects patriarchal rule by standing up to Albert and angrily asserting herself: "It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation" (Walker, Color 207). Both Janie and Celie embrace this pantheistic vision of wholeness and are able to overcome and heal from the abuses of patriarchy as a result.

Chapter 3:

Alice Walker's Possessing the Secret of Joy: A Healing

"On Stripping Bark From Myself"

Because women are expected to keep silent about
their close escapes I will not keep silent
. . .
No. I am finished with living
for what my mother believes
for what my brother and father defend
for what my lover elevates
for what my sister, blushing, denies or rushes
to embrace.

I find my own
small person
a standing self
against the world
an equality of wills
I finally understand

Besides:

My struggle was always against
an inner darkness: I carry within myself
the only known keys
to my death-- to unlock life, or close it shut
forever. A woman who loves wood grains, the color yellow.
and the sun, I am happy to fight
all outside murderers
as I see I must.

(Walker, Her Blue Body 270-271)

Alice Walker's most recent novel, Possessing the Secret of Joy, picks up on the themes of women's autonomy, economic oppression, and the struggle for selfhood through connection with the community as discussed in both Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God and Walker's The Color Purple. The novel expands these issues from the African American community in the American South to the broader arena of the African world, and in particular, to the fictional African community of Olinka. Possessing the Secret of Joy expands the focus on women's personal and political power and women's sexual autonomy brought up in Their Eyes Were Watching God and Walker's previous novels. Walker does this by drawing attention to a serious social issue, female genital mutilation, or FGM, an issue that widens the scope of interest from previous novels to include women's health and personal rights as well. Walker, as a well-known author, uses her position and influence to wield political influence on the issue of FGM. She would like to see the practice eradicated and I, as a result of this study, am in agreement. First, I will examine the nature and history of FGM in order to gain a complete understanding of it; given this framework, I will investigate Tashi's experience and the consequences of FGM for her as a means of discovering the ways in which Walker's political agenda informs her writing.

There are some stylistic similarities between Possessing the Secret of Joy and Their Eyes Were Watching God which reveal that Hurston's writing continues to influence her work, even after sixteen books of poetry and prose. Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God is written in free indirect discourse, enabling Hurston to write using "direct, indirect, or free indirect means" in order to partake of Hurston's 'word pictures,' and 'thought pictures' . . . as [Hurston] defined the nature of Afro-American spoken language," to create a medial language which permits both standard English as well as the use of African American vernacular (Johnson and Gates, "Black and Idiomatic" 84-85). Following the example set by Hurston in Their Eyes Were Watching God, Walker

wrote The Color Purple using the African American vernacular as well. However, to make the story more intimate and immediate to the reader, Walker chose an epistolary style which permitted her to write the intimate thoughts of Celie in particular, as well as her sister Nettie; in real life, Celie would not have had an outlet, nor, likely, the education, for that kind of self-expression. In Possessing the Secret of Joy Walker takes a new approach to the epistolary style. It is as if the individual characters--Adam, Olivia, Tashi/ Evelyn, M'zee, M'Lissa, Bentu Moraga/ Benny, Lisette, and Pierre--are all writing letters to the reader, although they are not addressed as such. The chapter titles are titled with the name of the speaker. These letters are not received by the reader in the order of the events contained therein, so the reader is faced with the challenge of putting the events in order as well as deciphering the meaning of the letters, and judging the validity of the contents therein.

In Possessing the Secret of Joy, Tashi, a minor character in The Color Purple, becomes the focus of attention. In The Color Purple, Tashi is first introduced through Nettie's letters to Celie as Olivia's childhood friend. In Possessing the Secret of Joy, more information about Tashi is supplied. In this work, the main character, Tashi, an African woman who has lived in America most of her adult life, returns to Africa and is challenged with overcoming madness, the source of which lies in her childhood. As a young woman in Africa, she undergoes a procedure known as female genital mutilation, or FGM, an experience that cuts her off from her sexual self and threatens to destroy her mentally. Her role as victim in an androcentric society that insists on the mutilation of its females as a means of maintaining its position of power will be discussed as well.

To remedy this irreparable physical damage, she enters intensive psychoanalysis and is treated by several unnamed Jungian analysts, an African American psychologist, Raye, and Carl Jung himself. Jung was born in Switzerland, educated in Zurich, and deeply interested in the human psyche, myth, archetypes, and cultural anthropology. The

inclusion of Jung as a character adds an interesting dimension to this story about an African-American woman struggling to come to terms with the cultural traditions of her homeland. Tashi's role as a psychologically wounded individual--much like the wounding of Walker's eye--and her subsequent healing via Jungian psychoanalysis, as well as her efforts to reclaim creative expression and find her own voice are the main focus of this section. This healing is a reflection of Walker's own experience of healing, and it echoes Janie and Celie's processes of self-discovery.

When Nettie, Samuel, Corrine, and Celie's children, Olivia and Adam, first arrive in the African village of Olinka, Tashi is portrayed as a small crying child in a group of welcoming Olinkans; she disappears soon after their arrival. As Samuel notes, "there could be no community in which there was one unhappy child" and he asks the question that pervades the entire novel: "Why was the little girl crying?" (Walker, Possessing 7-8). For the moment, all that is revealed is that the same morning they "arrived in the village one of Tashi's sisters had died. Her name was Dura, and she had bled to death" (Walker, Possessing 8). The cause of Dura's death is unknown to the reader, but Tashi's experience of her sister's death traumatizes and scars her, closing her off on a psychic level. Over the course of the novel, we learn through a number of speakers of the events leading to Tashi's psychological breakdown as well as the process of healing that takes place to repair the damage done to her as the result of the African tradition as it is experienced by her and imposed on her by her culture.

The initial clue about Dura's death and the hint that, prior to her actual death, the day of her death was a reason to celebrate, forces the reader to begin asking the same questions that Tashi asks about the traditions of the Olinkan culture. Unfortunately, Tashi does not ask those questions as a child and it is not until she is grown that the things she has forgotten begin to creep back into her subconscious. In Jungian terms, this is significant because middle age is a period during which an individual's outward focus

turns inward in a search for meaning; "cultural, philosophical, and spiritual values" become important and the individual attempts to "expand [her] conscious grasp of the unconscious that is master of [her] fate" (Hergenhahn, An Introduction 75; Roper, "Robertson" 36).

Walker takes Hurston's words at the beginning of Their Eyes Were Watching God to a new, psychological level in Possessing the Secret of Joy:

> Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do things accordingly. (Hurston, Their Eyes 1)

Traumatized, Tashi does not want to remember her sister's death or the circumstances surrounding it. The reader is given few details about the event either, other than the fact that Dura

> had been very excited during the period leading up to her death. Suddenly she had become the center of everyone's attention; every day there were gifts. Decorative items mainly: beads, bracelets, a bundle of dried henna for reddening hair and palms, but the odd pencil and tablet as well. Bright remnants of cloth for a headscarf and dress. The promise of shoes! (Walker, Possessing 9)

The mysterious event Tashi chooses to forget is the initiation ceremony performed on all young Olinkan girls, often referred to as female circumcision, but more accurately described as female genital mutilation, or FGM.

Although the issue of FGM is discussed within the context of a novel, Walker's interest in FGM is serious as she is interested in the abolishment of the practice in all cultures. In order to gain an understanding both of the passion she has for her subject as well as its significance within the novel, it is useful to examine briefly the nature of FGM and its history. The first mention of FGM in The Color Purple is an oblique one; Nettie writes Celie that "the one ritual they do have to celebrate womanhood is so

bloody and painful, I forbid Olivia to even think about it" (Walker, Color 195). Later Doris Baines, a wealthy white woman missionary, remarks that the Africans are good parents except for "a bit of bloody cutting around puberty"; she hopes that an African woman she has educated will educate the Africans of the need to eradicate FGM (Walker, Color 237). This indicates Walker's political interest in FGM's eradication as early as 1982 when The Color Purple was published.

This "bit of bloody cutting" exists in three main forms: "*Sunna* is the procedure where the prepuce (wood) or tip of the clitoris is cut. *Excision* involves removing the entire clitoris and all or part of labia minora. *Infibulation* is the scraping away of the entire external genitalia--the clitoris, labia majora and labia minora." (Mak, "Female Genital Mutilation" 10). The latter and most severe form is also known as Pharaonic circumcision and results in a period of healing during which

> [t]he legs are bound together so that the raw areas adhere and heal across the lower end of the vagina leaving a flattened vulva without the labia, and a middle scar stretching almost to the perineum. . . . the legs have been bound together for as long as forty days. . . . The urethra is hidden and complete closure of the vulva is prevented by the insertion of a small piece of wood, often a matchstick. Thus the normal urinary and vaginal openings are replaced by a small opening in the sealed scar. . . . the opening must be enlarged for sexual intercourse . . . [as well as] childbirth. (Sanderson, Against the Mutilation 13-16)

These procedures are undergone by girls as young as six. The day of the operation is celebrated by the girl's community and she is generally showered with gifts and special foods just as Dura was the day she was genitally mutilated.

However, just as Dura haemorrhaged to death as a result of female genital mutilation, there are many consequences to FGM which affect women's health in serious ways, including:

> "pain;" "haemorrhage;" "shock;" dysuria ("acute urinary retention") due to "fear of passing urine on the raw genitalia," "damage to the urethra and its surrounding tissue;" dysmenorrhoea [painful menstruation] caused by scar

> tissue blocking the opening of the vagina; "labial adhesion;" Haematocolpos ("accumulated menstrual blood of many months/years in the vagina"); "urinary infection" from "urine retention," "the use of unsterilized equipment and the application of local dressings of cowdung and ashes;" "septicaemia (blood poisoning)" [caused by same as above]; "fever" caused by "septicaemia," urine retention, and lack of antibiotics to fight infection; "tetanus" due to lack of sterilized instruments and dressings; "cysts and abscesses" forming in vulva as a result of Infibulation in particular; "Dyspareunia or painful intercourse: tight vaginal opening or pelvic infection and injury to the vulva area caused by repeated vigorous sexual acts;" "death" due to "shock, haemorrhage, tetanus, lack of availability of medical services." (Koso-Thomas, Circumcision, xii-xiii, 265)

A more recent consequence of FGM is the risk of acquiring HIV infection through the repeated use of unsterilized instruments in this bloody surgery (Dorkenoo and Elworthy, Female Genital Mutilation 9). From a health standpoint, these reasons would seem sufficient to bring an end to the tradition of FGM. However, history makes it more difficult to quickly abolish FGM on the substantial grounds of health issues alone.

FGM is a cultural tradition that has existed for as long as 6000 years, dating back to the time of the ancient Egyptians; it persists today in as many as twenty-eight African nations, as well as parts of Asia, and the tradition continues in "immigrant communities in the United States, Canada, Europe, and Australia" (Rowley, "Worldwide Ban" A2). Despite laws banning it in more "civilized" countries, practitioners from the individual cultures themselves ensure that the practice is continued in its new country. The World Health Organization estimates that more than two million women and girls undergo the procedure each year and that 80 million African women and "85 million to 115 million women [worldwide] have had their genitals mutilated" (Dorkenoo and Elworthy, Female Genital Mutilation 35; Rowley, "Worldwide Ban" A2).

The continuation of the practice relies on the perpetuation of a number of beliefs which vary depending on the specific ethnic or social group one studies. For example, in Egypt, infibulation is practised as to fulfill a "religious obligation prescribed in the

hadith of the Prophet Mohammed" (Kennedy, "Circumcision" 181). In Mali, Kenya, Sudan and Nigeria, it is believed that the clitoris is "an aggressive organ, threatening the male organ, and even endangering the baby during delivery. In some areas, notably Ethiopia, people believe that if the female genitals are not excised, they will dangle between the legs like a man's" (Dorkenoo and Elworthy, Female Genital Mutilation 13). Echoing these myths, Walker asserts that Tashi, like all Olinkans, believes the ancient myth that if a woman is not circumcised, "her unclean parts would grow so long they'd soon touch her thighs; she'd become masculine and arouse herself. No man could enter her because her own erection would be in his way" (Walker, Possessing 121). [4] In polygamous societies, there is a common fear among men that if their many wives' clitorises are not excised, they will be unable to satisfy their heightened libidos (Levin, "Women as Scapegoats" 217). Additionally, Freud's concept of the *vagina dentata*, or toothed vagina, as a threat to male sexuality is supported by a vast number of legends, folk tales, and myths derived from a variety of cultures and countries, all of which assert that "if the clitoris is not excised it will grow razor-sharp teeth and engulf and eat up the penis" (Walker and Parmar, Warrior Marks 110). Pratibha Parmar points out that the "Bambara concept of the clitoris [is] a dagger" while the Toba "view it as a residual tooth, presumably all that remains of the toothed vagina" (Walker and Parmar, Warrior Marks 110). Parmar asserts that these myths serve but one purpose: "to destroy women's right to autonomous sexuality in order to accommodate male fears and desires." (Walker and Parmar, 110).

These and other associated myths reveal an underlying fear of female sexuality and a patriarchal desire to wield control over women's bodies. Sociologist Bruno Bettelheim argues that, at FGM's origin, men were envious of women's "procreative function" and desired "to acquire power over the vagina and the dangerous menstrual blood":

> Ritual defloration may be underlain by similar psychological mechanisms, including men's desire to demonstrate counterphobically that they have the power to make women bleed from the vagina and to deny both their fear and envy by exercising dominance over the vagina. (Symbolic Wounds 120-121)

He suggests that male circumcision rituals evolved out of men's desire to copy menstruation by ritually scarifying their own genitals, that is, male circumcision, in order to gain the power over procreation which women hold within their bodies. These rituals, not having the desired result, led men to impose a ritual scarification ceremony on women which gives men control over women's bodies and expresses their "anger at and envy of women's ability to bear children when man cannot" (Bettelheim, Symbolic Wounds 123). The ritual in some societies (for example, the Liberian Poro) of male ingestion of the excised clitoris possibly indicates either a "hostile desire to take away from the other sex, or the envious desire to possess the incorporated parts" (Bettelheim, Symbolic Wounds 100-201).

While the above analysis reveals at least part of the psychological origins of FGM, other explanations for the practice are given. Some of these include: "[m]aintenance of cleanliness," "[p]ursuance of aesthetics," "[p]revention of still births in primigravida" [first pregnancy], "[p]romotion of social and political cohesion," "[p]revention of promiscuity," "[i]mprovement of male sexual performance and pleasure," "[i]ncrease of matrimonial opportunities," "[m]aintenance of good health," "[p]reservation of virginity," and the "[e]nhancement of fertility" (Koso-Thomas, Circumcision 5). The backbone of the majority of these reasons is the practice of FGM as a means of controlling female sexuality and morality. As Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem point out: "Infibulation creates the ultimate chastity belt, one forged out of the woman's own flesh" (Favazza, Bodies Under Siege 162). An infibulated woman is cut open at marriage to facilitate intercourse with her husband, cut further to enable

childbirth, and often reinfibulated more than once (usually after childbirth) to recreate, physically at least, a state of chastity. As Rose Oldfield Hayes points out, in Sudan, as in many African countries, "virgins are made, not born" ("Female Genital Mutilation" 622).

Nahid Toubia, Sudan's first woman surgeon and an anti-FGM activist, describes FGM as "'an extreme example of efforts common to societies around the world to suppress women's sexuality, ensure their subjugation and control their reproductive functions'" (Rowley, "Worldwide Ban" A2). Cultural relativism is important here, because while Western culture perceives FGM as barbaric and uncivilized, it fails to recognize its own "psychic and physical mutilations:" "unwanted hysterectomies, endless face-lifts, liposuction, bulimia, anorexia, silicone breast implants--all in the pursuit of youthfulness and an ever-changing notion of the ideal woman (Walker and Parmar, Warrior Marks 109).

In fact, clitoridectomy, the excision of the clitoris, was routinely performed beginning as early as 1858 in Europe and in the 1860s in the United States as a cure for various 'illnesses' afffecting women, including "aberrant behavior," "insanity," "masturbation, nymphomania, epilepsy, hysteria, and other disorders thought to be caused by female sexuality" (Paige, Politics 266). To Victorian society and especially to the medical community, "the clitoris was so unimportant to a normal woman as to not be missed if removed, yet lurking in its tissue was the greatest threat to female welfare ever known." (Sheehan, "Victorian Clitoridectomy" 12). Echoing the patriarchal mores of African society which reduced women's sexual role to that of fulfilling the man's needs and producing children, G. J. Barker-Benfield asserted that, in American culture at least,

> female genital surgery was an attempt to define women's social status in a changing economy and that both male and female slavery served to enforce the principle that sexuality was solely for the production of children and that women's sole function was to reproduce. Genital surgery also expressed the American ethos of ambition, individualism, and self control. . . . the ideology of controlling sexual energies developed to help

men dire
prevent w their mental energies toward work and achievement, and to
demands. men from distracting men from their ambition through sexual
The advancement of sci Paige, Politics 267)
various illnesses playe ce and the corresponding loss of belief in witchcraft to explain
explain human sexuality a role in the reliance on the new science of psychology to

The father of mand behaviour.

of one's psychological lern psychology, Sigmund Freud, posited that, over the course
sexuality must be elimir levelopment and the development of femininity, clitoridean
agency and active pow ted, essentially castrating women and "denying them the sexual
(Bennett, "Critical Cl r that would make them sexual subjects in their own right"
because it removed oridectomy" 249-250). Freud recommended clitoridectomy
masturbation and force ıe possibility of experiencing sexual satisfaction through
with a man (Bettelheim the woman "to enjoy only vaginal sexuality" via intercourse

The removal of Symbolic Wounds 252-254).
FGM, focuses any sexu a woman's clitoris, the common denominator of all types of
desires only. Olayinka I l activity a woman takes part in on satisfying the man's sexual
from a sexual organ to oso-Thomas explains that infibulation alters the female genitalia
male's sexual enjoymen a narrow orifice; the woman is merely a vehicle by which the
a woman are unaccep is made paramount (Circumcision 9). Lust and sexual desire in
(Favazza, Bodies Un able, making her unclear and an improper wife and mother
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means of ensuring wha by practitioners of FGM, and especially of infibulation, as a

Infibulat
womb, this conceived of as a state of cleanliness or purity:
a woma
both liton purifies, smoothes, and makes clean the outer surface of the
impervi e enclosure of the home of childbirth, it socializes or culturalizes
's fertility. Through occlusion of the vaginal orifice, her womb,
rally and figuratively, becomes a social space: enclosed,
us, virtually impenetrable. ("Womb as Oasis" 696)

In Possessing the Secret of Joy, the Olinka culture refer to FGM as "bathing" and M'Lissa refers to Tashi's wound "not as a wound but as a healing," implying that, without FGM, Tashi is unclean and her genitals are the wound that needs to be "healed" by FGM (Walker, Possessing 246, 63). The aesthetic of purity and enclosedness created by FGM reinforces the notion that a girl's genitals are impure, disgusting, and require alteration in order for the girl to become a valuable part of society. Wolf, arguing that aesthetics of beauty are products of patriarchy, makes this assessment: "*The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance*" (Beauty Myth 14). FGM continues because a woman's economic survival in many of these cultures depends on her getting married and gaining value by producing children; "whatever will make her more marriageable becomes desirable" (Morgan and Steinem, Outrageous Acts 335).

This economic exchange is interesting when one considers that FGM is a practice imposed on women by men, but perpetuated by women themselves, often by mothers on their own daughters. Janice Boddy asserts that "[i]nfibulation is an assertive and symbolic act, controlled by women in which the womb becomes a social space--enclosed, guarded, and impervious" (Gordon, "Female Circumcision" 11). In these cultures, women are only as valuable as their ability to bear and rear children. If FGM is made a pre-condition to marriage and childbirth as a means of asserting male control over female reproductive power, then to violate that pre-condition is to uproot one of the basic tenets of that society. There is no alternative but to perpetuate the practice of FGM if a woman or her daughters are to survive in that society. As Gruenbaum notes, "female circumcision forms part of a complex sociocultural arrangement of female subjugation in a strongly patrilineal, patriarchal society. . . . women who carry out the practice, and who are its strongest defenders, must be analyzed in terms of their weaker social position" ("Movement Against Clitoridectomy" 5).

Women object to changing the practice because they fear for their own as well as for their children's social and economic futures. For example, the role of midwife, as portrayed by M'Lissa in Possessing the Secret of Joy, is one of the few acceptable paid employments available for women in many of these countries. The midwife, usually an older woman, had the duties of facilitating both childbirth and FGM. Because the administration of FGM makes a young girl valuable as a future wife and mother, the practice reinforces the goals and values of the society; thus, the position of midwife is greatly esteemed and respected within the community and puts her in a position to influence other women to have the practice done to their daughters. The lack of value placed on women in Walker's fictional Olinkan society, as is the case in many real African societies, is portrayed several ways. When Olivia wonders why her friend Tashi is not allowed to go to school with her, she learns that Olinkan women are not educated because "[a] girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something" (Walker, Color 162). Tashi's mother receives the honorary and highly esteemed designation of "honorary man" after producing five sons for her husband and the community; Tashi's efforts to please her father are futile because she is a girl and therefore valueless (Walker, Color 171).

Walker reveals in The Color Purple some of the ways in which and means by which the fictional African village of Olinka are challenged to change their views on women's roles. These changes are largely due to the encroaching outside world. The missionaries, as portrayed by Samuel, his wife Corrine, their adopted (and Celie's birth) children, Adam and Olivia, and Nettie, bring news of the outside world as well as different cultural ideas as to how one should live. The advancement of the road (which all but destroys Olinkan faith in their roofleaf god) that connects growing modern African cities also affects the tiny, formerly isolated village of Olinka. Tashi's eagerness to learn from Olivia and the missionaries while the knowledge of her own society fails to

"really enter her soul" reveals that "Tashi knows she is learning a way of life that she will never live" (Walker, Color 166). The independent and spirited Tashi is compared to an aunt sold into slavery because she rebelled against village traditions: "This aunt refused to marry the man chosen for her. Refused to bow to the chief" (Walker, Color 166). A warning is there, however, revealing the consequence of rebelling against prescribed women's roles within African society; beside being sold into slavery, Tashi's aunt, it is clear, went insane also as she "[d]id nothing but lay up, crack cola nuts between her teeth and giggle" (Walker, Color 166).

Olinkan society frowns on educating women and Tashi's father rejects the notion that Tashi, if educated, could one day be a teacher or a nurse. Despite Tashi's mother's support for Tashi being educated like the boys, her father suggests to Nettie that Olivia learn "what women are for," just as Tashi is being taught their traditional purpose at home. Nettie reveals the powerlessness of Olinkan women: "the husband has life and death power over the wife. If he accuses one of his wives of witchcraft or infidelity, she can be killed" (Walker, Color 172). While Olinkan women earn respect as they fulfill their communal role and modern African American women have increased opportunities to fulfill themselves as individuals, Walker does not let the reader forget that inequalities between men and women's roles exist in African American communities as well. Both Olinkan and African American men have similar ways of speaking to women; the men barely acknowledge the women's existence and the women do not dare to "look in a man's face" but instead "look at his feet or his knees" (Walker, Color 168).

The influence of the outside world begins to have a profound effect on the centuries-old village of Olinka and its views on women's roles and power. This is particularly true as it pertains to African views on sexuality and the practice of the centuries-old tradition of female genital mutilation in Walker's novels. Education on FGM's dangers requires openness, however, and sexuality is definitely a taboo subject

among the fictional Olinkan people as well as many real Africans. In many African societies where FGM is practised a woman is "conditioned to feel shame about sexual matters . . . tradition has taught her that those most treasured values--health, fertility, and the welfare of eventual children--are especially threatened at such critical times as birth, circumcision, marriage, and menstruation" (Kennedy, "Circumcision" 182). Shame leads to ignorance and silence as the subject of sexuality is taboo and therefore never discussed or questioned, as noted by Koso-Thomas:

> In Africa there is ignorance everywhere of feminine sexuality. The belief that female response to sexual stimuli should be suppressed, has discouraged interest in feminine sexuality. Sex is taboo in most African societies and sex is never to be discussed even with one's own husband. It is un-African to display love in public, both men and women feel embarrassed by it. African sexuality is supposed to be a gift for the procreation of the human species; any outward display of emotion related to sexuality is interpreted as debasing a divine gift. (Circumcision 13)

Tashi had no understanding of the destruction that would take place when she underwent FGM; she was not even aware of what a woman's genitals are supposed to look like until after she came to the United States. She says, "My own body was a mystery, as was the female body, beyond the function of the breasts, to almost everyone I knew" (Walker, Possessing 121).

Yet despite general ignorance of the body's mysteries and the overall respect given to the taboo against sex, the influence of the modern world, as identified in her relationship with Adam, causes Tashi to venture outside the boundaries set by Olinkan society. Tashi and Adam violate the Olinkans' strongest taboo by "making love in the fields;" Adam notes, "So strong was this taboo that no one in living memory had broken it. And yet we did. . . . lovemaking in the fields jeopardized the crops . . . no one ever saw us, and the fields produced their harvests as before" (Walker, Possessing 27). Even more serious, however, Adam had oral sex, or cunnilingus, with Tashi, breaking the Olinkan taboo against having sex solely for pleasure, that is, with no reproductive

purpose. Adam remembers lying "on my belly between her legs, my cheeks caressed by the gentle rhythms of her thighs. My tongue bringing us no babies, and to both of us delight. This way of loving, among her people, the greatest taboo of all" (Walker, Possessing 28). It is unclear whether Adam and Tashi break these taboos because Adam is not Olinkan and therefore not subject to its traditions and taboos or because Olinkan society is changing as a result of "civilization."

As a result of the encroaching road on the village of Olinka, life begins to change. While initially the road builders and the road are welcomed, many Olinkans' views change when they see the ramifications of Western civilization. Olinka loses its former way of life as the road splits the village in half, a physical division that mirrors the psychic split that takes place in the Olinkan people. This split is most visible in the development of a group of rebels called the Mbeles. Angry that the road builders forced the Olinkan village to move away from their water source and disheartened at the eradication of roofleaf, a plant the Olinkan people see as their god, many Olinkans "ran away to join the *mbeles* or forest people, who live deep in the jungle, refusing to work for whites or be ruled by them" (Walker, Color 234). Tashi, like many Olinkans who wish to "show they still have their own ways . . . even though the white man has taken everything else," decides to resist these changes; to signify her solidarity as a people, Tashi decides to have two traditional mutilations done: facial scarification to identify herself with her tribe and the "female initiation ceremony" (Walker, Color 245).

Peer pressure plays a significant role in Tashi's ultimate decision to undergo FGM as an adult. Dura's death as a result of FGM is the probable reason that Tashi did not undergo the FGM operation at age eleven and survives, genitals intact, until she reaches adulthood. At the time when the ritual should have taken place, the Olinkan village chief, pressured by Christian white missionaries to stop FGM (perceived by outsiders as barbaric) agrees not to enforce the tradition. However, M'Lissa, the Olinkan

midwife and practitioner of FGM and an unmarried woman with no other financial means of survival, has an economic interest in perpetuating the tradition. In addition, Dura and Tashi's mother, Nafa, wants to ensure the marriageability of her daughters. Knowing that Samuel, Nettie, and Corrine were African American missionaries and yet seeing them only as African, she felt that the tradition would be re-established; she "could not imagine a black person that was not Olinkan" and who would not follow Olinkan traditions (Walker, Possessing 257). Unfortunately, Dura is a hemophiliac; her wound will not heal, her blood cannot clot, and she bleeds to death.

Tashi does not undergo FGM as a child but she pays a price for being different. The other village children tease her and make her feel like an outsider: "[M]y uncircumcised vagina was thought of as a monstrosity. They laughed at me. Jeered at me for having a tail. I think they meant my labia majora. After all, none of them had vaginal lips; none of them had a clitoris; they had no idea what these things looked like; to them I was bound to look odd (Walker, Possessing 121). As an adult, Tashi remains an outsider in Olinkan culture. Not only is she uncircumcised which makes her an unfit wife and mother to an Olinkan man, she is also the friend of an African American missionary family (and is therefore a potential traitor to her own people) and the wife of a non-Olinkan, American man, Adam. When in America, she feels alienated from herself and her culture: "My body had left. My soul had not" (Walker, Possessing 116). When in Africa, she still feels that she is not truly Olinkan and so she accepts Our Leader's admonishment to perpetuate the old traditions and decides to have FGM done. Raye, her psychologist, asks why Tashi would willingly give up the satisfying sex life she had with Adam and Tashi answers, "To be accepted as a real woman by the Olinka people; to stop the jeering. Otherwise I was a thing" (Walker, Possessing 122). Tashi wishes to change her position as an outsider, as Other, to become part of the dominant culture: "Completely woman. Completely African. Completely Olinka" (Walker, Possessing 64).

The consequences of both the facial scarification and FGM are devastating for Tashi both on a physical and psychic level, although she is able to recover from the former with the support of Adam. After undergoing the facial scarification, an operation often forced on the younger generation by the tribal elders, Nettie finds Tashi considerably changed: "She'd lost a considerable amount of weight, and seemed listless, dull-eyed and tired" (Walker, Color 285). Her face is swollen, red, and irritated and she is too ashamed to raise her head. She is even more ashamed when Adam proposes marriage to her and she refuses on the grounds that she will be considered a "savage" in any culture other than her own, especially in America. To show his support for her decision to wear the traditional marks of her culture, Adam undergoes the facial scarification as well and they are married; at this point, they have reached a balance between their different cultures that brings them together as a couple.

After undergoing FGM, Tashi is a changed woman. When a young Olinkan boy, Banse, leads Adam to Tashi in the Mbeles encampment, Tashi is lying down weaving grass mats. Adam remarks on the difference in her demeanor:

> The first thing I noticed was the flatness of her gaze. It frightened me. . . . I could not tell if she was happy to see me. Her eyes no longer sparkled with anticipation. They were as flat as eyes that have been painted in, with a dull paint. There were five small cuts in each side of her face, like the marks one makes to keep score while playing tic-tac-toe. Her legs, ashen and wasted, were bound. (Walker, Possessing 43-44)

Obviously, this is not a child's game of tic-tac-toe; Tashi is wounded, both physically and psychically. She is aware of the psychic change within herself, as seen when Adam comes to find Tashi in the Mbele camp: "*My eyes see him but they do not register his being. Nothing runs out of my eyes to greet him. It is as if my self is hiding behind an iron door*" (Walker, Possessing 45).

When she left Olinka to join the Mbeles, Tashi describes herself astride a donkey as being "in the pose of a chief, a warrior" (Walker, Possessing 22). In her mind, joining

the resistance and participating in the ancient rituals of facial scarification and FGM will make her an Olinkan warrior, fighting for the rights of her oppressed people. Tashi believes that participating in these rituals will unite her with the other women members of the resistance whom she sees as "strong, invincible," "terribly bold, terribly revolutionary and free" and "leaping to the attack" (Walker, Possessing 64).

Unfortunately for Tashi, she does not realize her impotence as an agent of social and political change until after the facial scarification and FGM, acts which were to signify her support of the Mbele resistance movement and to reaffirm the importance of Olinkan traditions. Instead of being transformed into the woman warrior she had hoped to become, she finds that "her own proud walk had become a shuffle" (Walker, Possessing 65). Later, when angry enough to kill M'Lissa for betraying her and performing FGM on her, she finds that her mutilated body prevents her from taking any action: "I am unable to move. I look down at my feet. Feet that hesitate before any nonflat surface: stairs, hills. Feet that do not automatically or nimbly leap over puddles or step gracefully onto curbs" (Walker, Possessing 224).

In reality, there is no opportunity within the Olinkan social structure for a woman to play a significant social or political role other than those of wife and mother. Tashi thinks the women's role in the Mbele camp is "to forage for food and to conduct raids against the plantations," and "to recruit new warriors" (Walker, Possessing 64). However, Adam never sees any of these women in the camp other than Tashi and M'Lissa, the circumciser, and M'Lissa later confesses that what Tashi believed was, in fact, a lie: "It was the camp itself that needed liberation. When the women came they were expected to cook and clean--and be screwed--exactly as they had been at home. When they saw how things were, they left" (Walker, Possessing 244). In the Mbeles' effort to reconstruct "a traditional Olinkan village from which to fight," they sent for M'Lissa, the *tsunga*, or circumciser, and Tashi, an uncircumcised woman on which to

impose tradition (Walker, Possessing 244). Unwittingly, Tashi buys into the Mbeles' need to reassert Olinkan traditions because she feels pressure to fit in.

There are other physical ramifications of FGM for Tashi. Urination and menstruation are extremely painful and last longer than normal, and the latter is accompanied by two weeks per month of premenstrual cramps and a soured blood odor that makes her want to remain "completely hidden from human contact, virtually buried" (Walker, Possessing 67). Fear of being "held down and cut open" to give birth by cesarean section causes Tashi to decide to abort her first pregnancy, a daughter (Walker, Possessing 224). Her second pregnancy is complicated as well. Sexual penetration was too painful for Tashi, but despite this fact and due to the "aggressive mobility of sperm" she becomes pregnant with Benny, also known as Bentu Moraga. After an extremely difficult birth that leaves a "look of horror" on the obstetrician's face, Benny is born:

> The obstetrician broke two instruments trying to make an opening large enough for Benny's head. Then he used a scalpel. Then a pair of scissors used ordinarily to sever cartilage from bone. . . .
> [Benny's] head was yellow and blue and badly misshapen. . . .
> Benny, my radiant brown baby, the image of Adam, was retarded. Some small but vital part of his brain crushed by our ordeal. (Walker, Possessing 57, 61)

FGM has the further effect of preventing Tashi and Adam from having a normal sexual relationship, causing Tashi to run away from Adam altogether at one point (Walker, Possessing 99).

Tashi's psyche is fractured as a result of FGM, as is evident in the chapter titles which indicate who is speaking; Tashi is "Tashi" the Olinkan, "Evelyn" the African American, "Tashi-Evelyn-Mrs. Johnson" the Olinkan-American wife of Adam and mother of Benny, and either "Tashi-Evelyn" or "Evelyn-Tashi," depending on which culture appears to dominate. Finally, she is Tashi Evelyn Johnson Soul, revealing that, in

the end, all the fractured parts of her psyche combine to make an unhyphenated whole. The disintegration of Tashi's mental state begins at the moment of Dura's death as a consequence of FGM. Tashi finds herself depressed and plagued by a mysterious recurring nightmare following Adam's affair with Lisette. Olivia, out of concern for Tashi's mental health, arranges with the help of Lisette for her to see a psychoanalyst in Switzerland who is also Lisette's uncle.

Interestingly, there are numerous clues given to suggest that the psychoanalyst is, in fact, Carl Jung, former student of the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. In 1925 Jung went on safari to Africa, visiting Kenya, Mount Elgon, and the Nile, and returned to Switzerland via Egypt in 1926, a journey evident in the decor of Tashi's psychoanalyst's office (Jung, Portable Jung xxxvi):

> This white witch doctor scribbles, only a little, behind his desk, on which there are small stone and clay figures of African gods and goddesses from Ancient Egypt. I noticed them before lying down on his couch, which is covered by a tribal rug. . . . Olivia has brought me here. Not to the father of psychoanalysis [Freud] . . . But to one of his sons, whose imitation of him--including dark hair and beard, Egyptian statuettes on his desk, the tribal-rug covered couch and the cigar, which smells of bitterness--will perhaps cure me. (Walker, Possessing 10-11)

To offer further evidence of his identity as Carl Jung, Tashi's psychoanalyst writes in a letter to his niece, Lisette, that he has not been called "Mzee," meaning "Old Man," since "the natives of Kenya did so spontaneously" during his sojourn there "over a quarter of a century ago"; Jung went on safari to Africa, including Kenya, from 1925 to 1926 (Walker, Possessing 85; Jung, Portable Jung xxxvi). He wonders why, if Tashi is so afraid of the mysterious tower of her dreams, she is not also afraid of his "turret/ *tower,*" referring to an actual stone castle called The Tower which Jung began building in 1923 and retired to in 1947 in Bollingen, Switzerland near Lake Zurich, where Mzee takes Tashi and Adam sailing (Walker, Possessing 87, 71; Jung, Portable Jung xxxvi, xli). Mzee signs his letter to Lisette, "Your uncle Carl" (Walker, Possessing 87).

Walker's choice of Carl Jung, or Mzee as he will be referred to in this thesis, as Tashi's psychoanalyst is significant because Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, as well as the importance of archetypes and archetypal myths and dreams, is key in Tashi's process of psychic healing. Tashi responds to Mzee because he represents "the exotic Western and European culture she so adores," while Mzee is able to realize, through Adam and Tashi's "otherness" as both Africans and Americans, "a truly universal self":

> An ancient self that thirsts for knowledge of the experiences of its ancient kin. Needs this knowledge and the feelings that come with it, to be whole. A self that is horrified at what was done to Evelyn, but recognizes it as something that is also done to me. A truly universal self. That is the essence of healing that in my European, "professional" life I frequently lost. (Walker, Possessing 86)

Mzee is effective as a therapist because he and Tashi are able to learn from each other and, in so doing, each comes closer to achieving the ultimate goal of individuation or self-actualization, as it is termed in Jungian psychology.

There are three levels to the psyche, according to Jung: first, consciousness; second, the personal unconscious, which is comprised of those things which have either lost their intensity and are forgotten, those things the conscious mind has repressed, or sense-impressions which were never fully registered with the conscious mind; and third, the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious as "the ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation, is not individual, but common to all men, and perhaps even to all animals , and is the true basis of the individual psyche" (Jung, Portable Jung 38). It is represented and revealed by "archetypes or norms of myth" which are "*patterns of instinctual behaviour*" (Jung, Portable Jung 61).

Some of the archetypes Jung identified within the collective unconscious are those which comprise the elements of the human psyche. The goal of Jungian psychology is to "bring the archetypes of the persona, the anima, the shadow, and the

self into balance, resulting in self-actualization" (Hergenhahn, An Introduction 71). The persona is the role in life consciously played by the individual while the anima and animus represent the "individual's true inner self" (Mish, Merriam-Webster's 867, 46). The anima is the "female component of the male psyche" resulting from the experiences men have had with women through the eons," while the animus is the corresponding male component of the female psyche (Hergenhahn, An Introduction 71). The "darkest, deepest part of the psyche" which "contains all of the animal instincts" is the shadow; it is "immoral, aggressive, and passionate" (Hergenhahn, An Introduction 71). Conscious examination of these archetypes of the psyche in an attempt to "know oneself" leads to self-actualization, or individuation, wherein the individual achieves a balance between the paired and contrasting human functions of feeling and sensation, thinking and intuition (Jung, Portable Jung xxvii).

Jung also argued that, in the event that "the manner of life and thought of an individual so departs from the norms of the species that a pathological state of imbalance ensues, of neurosis or psychosis, dreams and fantasies analogous to fragmented myths will appear" (Jung, Portable Jung xxii). Jung believed that, rather than interpreting such dreams as the outcome of "repressed infantile memories (reduction to autobiography)" as Freud had posited, one should compare those dreams "with the analogous mythic forms (amplification to mythology) so that the disturbed individual may learn to see himself depersonalized in the mirror of the human spirit and discover by analogy the way to his own larger fulfillment" (Jung, Portable Jung xxii). In other words, individuation or self-actualization is achieved through identification with the collective unconscious as expressed by universal archetypes; the means of this identification is through analysis of both dreams and the products of the "'active imagination'" (Jung, Portable Jung 67). In Tashi's case, the repressed shadow part of her psyche reveals the hidden archetypes of

the collective unconscious through her dreams as well as the products of her "active imagination": her fantasy life and her creative works.

As a result of her traumatic childhood experience of Dura's death--a repressed memory--Tashi's psyche is unbalanced, a state evidenced by her repeated nightmarish dreams. Tashi's terrifying dreams, as "self-representations of the psychic life-process," indicate the disturbed state of her psyche (Jung, Portable Jung 76). It is not enough, however, to simply have the dream as an expression of psychic repression; it is important to consciously examine the dream in order to understand it and bring it out of that repressed state. Dreams, according to Jung, "are the natural reaction of the self-regulating psychic system and, as such, point forward to a higher, potential health, not simply backward to past crises" (Jung, Portable Jung xxii). To understand the dream is to explore and bring into balance the repressed areas of Tashi's psyche; Mzee can offer a listening ear and an understanding of the nature of archetypes, dreams, and the inner workings of the psyche, but Tashi must do the psychic work; as Mzee tells Tashi and Adam: "You yourselves are your last hope" (Walker, Possessing 53).

So terrified is she of what lies behind the locked door of her psyche, Tashi cannot bring herself to tell Mzee "about the dream I have every night that terrifies me" (Walker, Possessing 25). However, upon awaking from one of her night terrors, she tells Adam about it:

> There is a tower, she says. I think it is a tower. It is tall, but I am inside. I don't really ever know what it looks like from outside. It is cool at first, and as you descend lower and lower to where I'm kept, it becomes dank and cold, as well. It's dark. There is an endless repetitive sound that is like the faint scratch of a baby's fingernails on paper. And there are millions of things moving around me in the dark. I cannot see them. And they've broken my wings! I can see them lying crossed in a corner like discarded oars. Oh, and they're forcing something in one end of me, and from the other they are busy pulling something out. I am long and fat and the color of tobacco spit. Gross! And I can not move! (Walker, Possessing 26-27)

Tashi does not understand the dream at this point, but by telling Adam--who then tells Mzee and Lisette, who then tells the dream to Pierre--she begins the long task of discovering its meaning and putting her unbalanced psyche into balance as a result of her doctor-patient relationship with Mzee. Pierre, an anthropologist and the child of Adam and Lisette, is fascinated and obsessed with discovering the mystery of Tashi's dream of the tower.

Jung's pivotal work, Symbols of Transformation, argues that archetypes are "inherently expressive . . . of common human needs, instincts, and potentials" and that "archetypal themes are displayed in the supporting myths of the culture" (Jung 1971, xxii). The apparent patriarchal instinct of men to assert control over women's bodies is seen clearly in the myth of the termite hill in Possessing the Secret of Joy. This myth is also seen in the North African Dogon creation myth "in which the Creator God (male) cuts a termite hill symbolizing the female clitoris" (Sims, "Warrior Marks" 1). Nonetheless, Pierre determines that Tashi's dream is derived from an archetypal myth of this nature, despite the fact that it has never resided in her mind on a conscious level, but has remained an unconscious and terrifying part of her psyche's shadow.

Just prior to Tashi's execution, Pierre reveals the full import of her dream of the dark tower. Pierre believes that the Dogon myth of God's creation of the world from clay evolved from observation and emulation of (in adobe houses and pottery making) the building techniques of the termite. If this evolution is possible, then it is plausible that the role of the female in the termite community would be emulated also. Thus the mysterious elements of Tashi's dream move from her unconscious mind to become clear in her conscious mind. She is trapped inside a termite hill which represents the clitoris; she is "heavy, wingless, and inert, the Queen of the dark tower" (Walker, Possessing 239). Pierre tells Tashi:

> You are the queen who loses her wings. It is you lying in the dark with millions of worker termites . . . You are being stuffed with food at one end . . . and having your eggs, millions of them, constantly removed at the other. You who are . . . only a tube through which generations of visionless offspring pass . . . You who endure all this, only at the end to die, and be devoured by those to whom you've given birth. (Walker, Possessing 232-233)

Tashi wonders how this archetype of woman as egg-bearer came to exist in her unconscious when her conscious mind has never heard of it before. Raye explains the nature of the archetype to her: "We think it was told you in code, somehow . . . Not told you directly that you, as a woman, were expected to reproduce as helplessly and inertly as a white ant [termite]; but in a culture in which it is mandatory that every single female be systematically desexed, there would have to be some coded mythological reason for it . . ." (Walker, Possessing 233).

In the novel, the coded mythological reason for the enforced genital mutilation of women is derived from the Dogon creation myth in which Amma (God) created the world from a lump of clay. Amma is male and the earth is feminine, her vulva represented by an anthill and her clitoris by a termite hill; Amma "cut down the termite hill" which became erect like a penis (and therefore masculine), and "had intercourse with the excised earth" (Walker, Possessing 173-174). This creation myth also calls for the ritual inscription of sexual roles on the body, as enacted through genital mutilation of both sexes. Because it was believed that each person had two souls, male and female, the need to ritually inscribe the sexual role of the person on the physical body set a standard for male and female circumcision; the prepuce of the penis was removed representing the removal of the female element from the male, while the clitoris was excised to represent the removal of the male element from the female. As Tashi notes, "When the clitoris rose . . . God thought it looked masculine. Since it was 'masculine' for a clitoris to rise and necessary to remove the masculine element from the female, God could be

excused for cutting it down. Which he did. Then . . . God fucked the hole that was left" (Walker, Possessing 234-235).

Tashi realizes the deception of the myth and this realization of the source of this archetypal myth creates a new problem for her. She is not able to reconcile these new truths with the archetypal myth of the termite hill that has occupied her unconscious for her whole life and for the entire history of her culture. However, Tashi's psyche is not concerned with whether its experience results in an archetype that truly reflects the physical facts of clitoral excision and other forms of FGM; its only concern is in expressing the way in which it experiences that which the archetype represents. Unable to repress the archetype as represented by her dream of the termite hill any longer, her psyche is forced to deal with the dream's contents on a conscious level and interpret the dream in a way that enables her to maintain a balance between all the different components of her psychological self. Fortunately for Tashi, she has the support and aid of her family and friends, as well as Mzee and Raye, some of whom aid in researching the archetypal myths that appear in her dreams and in giving her the opportunity to delve into her psychological self to discover the mythological truths which have eluded her and deluded her into undergoing FGM.

The degree of Tashi's psychological imbalance is evident in Tashi's fantasy and creative life and results in the murder of her circumciser, M'Lissa. Since she was a child she liked to tell stories, but as she matures, she realizes that story-telling and fantasizing are a means of avoiding and deflecting the truths she has discovered--truths which conflict with the archetypal dream of the termite hill. Even as Tashi begins to tell her own story, she interrupts it with a story: "I did not realize for a long time that I was dead. And that reminds me of a story . . ." (Walker, Possessing 3). Olivia, Tashi's lifelong friend, concurs that her storytelling is a way of evading telling or dealing with the truth: "This is the way Tashi expressed herself. The way she talked and evaded the issue, even

as a child" (Walker, Possessing 6). Olivia and her family met Tashi on the day of Dura's death, so there is no evidence as to whether Tashi's evasive storytelling began prior to or at that point. Nonetheless, she is traumatized by Dura's death and blocks the event from her mind, disassociating Dura's bleeding to death from the onset of her own fear of blood. As an adult, Tashi tells Raye about her "lifelong tendency to escape from reality into the realm of fantasy and storytelling":

> Without this habit, I said, it would be impossible for me to guess anything out of the ordinary had happened to me. . . .
> I mean, if I find myself way off into an improbable tale, imagining it or telling it, then I can guess something horrible has happened to me and that I can't bear to think about it. . . . the story is only the mask for the truth? (Walker, Possessing 132)

At her own trial, her imagination takes over; for example, the word "testimony" (referring to the "custom of two men holding each other's testicles in a gesture of trust") leads her to fantasize that the witness and the attorney are involved in a "torrid romance" (Walker, Possessing 107).

Even after Pierre has explained the dream of the tower to her and releases the archetype of the termite hill from her unconscious, Tashi still finds herself veering off into a fantasy world. During Pierre's explanation of the myth, Tashi finds she is unable to pay attention and feels that she is "under the influence of a new, mild and quite pleasant drug" (Walker, Possessing 175). She claims to be listening, but "the words, on touching my ear, bounce back into his mouth, as if they're made of India rubber" (Walker, Possessing 175). Then, just as the image of the cock in Mzee's film triggers her remembrance of Dura's death, the phrase "an invisible hand" on the page of Griaule's book jumps out at her. Tashi recognizes that the myth's claim that the pain of childbirth is concentrated in the clitoris (symbolized as the sting of a dangerous scorpion) and that its excision removes that pain is false; she has no clitoris yet felt a great deal of pain giving birth to Benny; she cannot accept the myth's assertion that excision is a remedy

for pain or that sexual delineation of the body's sexual organs is necessary to determine the sexual nature of one's soul (Walker, Possessing 177).

Mbati, a young Olinkan woman who took care of M'Lissa in her final days and Tashi's adopted daughter, feels angry that she has never heard the true reason why she was genitally mutilated. This expression of anger causes Tashi to feel "split . . . in two": she is present in body, but her imagination creates a scenario wherein she is a small child who overhears a group of male elders' conversation about the importance of FGM as a means of controlling women (Walker, Possessing 238). Tashi's truth is embedded in her active imagination and her stories: both her own truth--her experience of FGM and its consequences-- and the truth of the origin of FGM as it lies buried in the collective unconscious of her culture and subsequently in her own unconscious mind.

Jung suggested that in order to analyze one's fantasies, one should contemplate "any one fragment of any fantasy that seems significant . . . until its content becomes visible, that is to say, the relevant associative material in which it is embedded" (Jung, Portable Jung 68). When she first arrives at Mzee's and begins psychoanalysis, she sketches the scene of her own birth, her "entrance into reality" when her mother met a leopard on the path as she was about to give birth to Tashi (Walker, Possessing 54). She paints the leopard with two legs and her "terrified mother with four," perhaps signifying her unconscious understanding of her mother's position as victim as well as perpetrator of FGM (Walker, Possessing 54).

Tashi knows from the experience of giving birth to Benny, and perhaps also subconsciously and intuitively, that her birth was not an easy one and that her mother's "official story" of her birth is a lie; however, Tashi's coping mechanism of story-telling and fantasizing allows her to defer dealing with reality. Instead, she imagines that she is the female leopard that leapt at her mother, who was pregnant with herself at the time. Tashi identifies (anthropomorphically) with the leopard's horror and rage at the murder

of the leopard's family, subconsciously allowing herself to feel her own horror and rage at the physical and psychological consequences of FGM for her (Walker, Possessing 20).

The trigger for her repressed memories of Dura's death is Mzee's anthropological film of the initiation rites of a group of young girls. The actual ritual of FGM is not apparent in the film, but the "large fighting cock . . . crowing mightily" "completely terrorize[s]" Tashi and she faints (Walker, Possessing 73). Upon awakening, Tashi becomes obsessed with painting "a rather extended series of ever larger and more fearsome fighting cocks" (Walker, Possessing 73). Gradually, through this creative endeavor, the remaining fragments of what Tashi has repressed since childhood become clear. She realizes that the foot in the painting is M'Lissa's, the cock is actually a chicken, and the chicken is impatiently waiting to be fed Dura's clitoris after M'Lissa excises it. Dura's clitoris "was so insignificant and unclean that [M'Lissa] carried it not in her fingers but between her toes" (Walker, Possessing 75).

The mental strain of this realization, as she consciously heads down the "'crazy road'" signified by the name of the pattern in M'Lissa's wrap, causes Tashi to take on the "classic pose of the deeply insane":

> There are no words to describe how sick I felt as I painted. How nauseous; as the cock continued to grow in size, and the bare foot with its little insignificant morsel approached steadily toward what I felt would be the crisis, the unbearable moment, for me. For, as I painted, perspiring, shivering, and moaning faintly, I felt that every system in my body, every connecting circuit in my brain, was making an effort to shut down. It was as if the greater half of my being were trying to murder the lesser half . . . " (Walker, Possessing 74).

Adam, in his attempts to justify Tashi's murder of M'Lissa to the courtroom, recognizes that her insane behaviour is reactive to the situation she is faced with as a victim of FGM. He asserts that Tashi is a "tortured woman" whose "whole life was destroyed by the enactment of a ritual upon [her] body which [she] had not been equipped to

understand" (Walker, Possessing 162). Yet he marvels at the freedom she finds in her insanity as he speaks on her behalf:

> My wife is *hurt*, I say. *Wounded. Broken.* Not mad.
> Evelyn laughs. Flinging her head back in deliberate challenge. The laugh is short. Sharp. The bark of a dog. Beyond hurt. Unquestionably mad. Oddly free. (Walker, Possessing 167)

As terrifying as the process of bringing to consciousness what has so long been repressed, Tashi is finally able to look "fully into the wicked gaze of my creature;" she is no longer frightened and, more importantly, her feelings of anxiety about the fearsome chicken wane when she understands that the chicken's "overweening" and "egotistical" demeanor are the result of a "diet of submission" (Walker, Possessing 80). She finds that she is no longer afraid of the sight of blood as she has been since Dura's death.

Having remembered Dura's death, she feels "[i]mmeasurably" better, and is finally able to express the truth of it to Mzee and Adam, a verbalization which dislodges the boulder she feels blocking her throat:

> I knew what the boulder was; that it was a word; and that behind that word I would find my earliest emotions. Emotions that had frightened me insane. I had been going to say, before the boulder barred my throat: my sister's death; because that was how I had always thought of Dura's demise. She'd simply died. She'd bled and bled and bled and then there was death. No one was responsible. No one to blame. Instead, I took a deep breath and exhaled it against the boulder blocking my throat: I remembered my sister Dura's *murder*, I said, exploding the boulder. (Walker, Possessing 83)

Tashi's unconscious refusal to hear Dura "screaming in [her] ears since it happened" is echoed at Benny's birth (Walker, Possessing 83). Tashi feels "as if there was a loud noise of something shattering on the floor, there between me and Adam and our baby and the doctor. But there was only a ringing silence. Which seemed oddly, after a moment, like the screaming of monkeys" (Walker, Possessing 59).

This screaming is essentially a primal scream, resonating from the collective unconscious where the mythological termite-hill-as-clitoris archetype finds its origin. The idea of the primal scream as connected to the collective unconscious is later reinforced by Tashi's fellow prisoner and AIDS victim, Hartford. Adam listens to his last confession as he lies dying:

> "The screaming of monkeys . . . is really unlike the scream of [a] human. But somehow, because of the chimps' and monkeys' faces, their screaming is even more human. Everything they think, everything they fear, everything they feel, is as clear as if you'd known them all your life. As if they'd slept in the same bed as you! (Walker, Possessing 264)

Hartford's hunting to obtain monkey kidneys for a pharmaceutical company's vaccine business and the Olinkan FGM ritual reveal the same problem. "[H]aving been indoctrinated from birth to believe" in the correctness of exploitation of the earth's resources or exploitation of women's bodies, how could anyone "anticipate[] the evil of civilization"? (Walker, Possessing 265). Having evolved from primates, the screaming of monkeys represents, essentially, the archetypal screaming of humanity as the pain and suffering that is the inevitable result of humanity's abuses of nature and of each other are buried and repressed.

A second boulder is dislodged from Tashi's throat in therapy with Raye, the psychologist recommended by Mzee to replace him after his death. Mzee, as a white European who has an anthropological interest in Olinkan culture as a primitive society, is ill-equipped to fully comprehend the true nature of the effects of FGM on Tashi's body and her mind. Tashi finds it difficult to know where to begin in explaining her life to him when he does not even recognize that she is African, not Negro: "One was left speechless by all such a person couldn't know" (Walker, Possessing 19). Raye, on the other hand, is "plucky enough to accompany [Tashi] where he could not" (Walker, Possessing 134). Although Tashi resents the "spring in [Raye's] step" that is the result of

being unmutilated, she feels connected to Raye because of their shared African ancestry (Walker, Possessing 116). In Raye, Tashi sees an African American woman able to practise "an ageless magic, the foundation of which was the ritualization, or the acting out, of empathy. . . . [She is] a spiritual descendant of the ancient healers who taught our witch doctors and were famous for their compassionate skill" (Walker, Possessing 134).

Tashi attempts to explain the events that led to her undergoing FGM as an adult and finds "a boulder, twin to the one that suppressed the truth of Dura's murder, begin closing my throat" (Walker, Possessing 116). The boulder is the lie that says her life is "insignificant" in comparison to that of Our Leader, the Olinkan political leader who was exiled, then arrested and imprisoned by the white regime, and finally martyred for his people; he was revered as a god, and then as a Christ figure after his death. Revered as a god by his people, the Olinkan people did not question his "[s]ensible" and "correct" instructions on how they should live: "That we must remember who we were. That we must fight the white oppressors without ceasing. . . . that we must return to the purity of our own culture and traditions. That we must not neglect our ancient customs" (Walker, Possessing 117). Tashi does not question Our Leader's instructions at the time, but voices her concerns later to Raye: "But what if he'd told you to do something that destroyed you? Something that was wrong?" (Walker, Possessing 117). She answers her own question and so eradicates the second boulder in her throat by revealing to Raye (and to herself) the true nature of FGM, the mythological reasons for FGM, her fears that she could not be accepted as a woman without it, and the truth of what FGM has cost her. With the verbalization of this knowledge, "[t]he boulder now not only had rolled off my tongue but was rolling quite rapidly away from me toward the door" (Walker, Possessing 123).

Having conquered one fear, that of remembering the true nature of Dura's death--that she was murdered and someone is responsible for her sister's murder--Tashi is able

to examine other repressed feelings and fears, in particular, her feelings towards M'Lissa and the effects FGM had on her. The foot holding the clitoris in Tashi's painting is "[l]ame, subservient, mindless," but the owner of the foot, M'Lissa, is not and Tashi has to confront her feelings of hatred for and rage at M'Lissa (Walker, Possessing 80). Anger and hatred become a powerful tool in this scenario and they help Tashi deal with some of the psychological effects of FGM.

The nature of the clitoris itself is important if one is to understand fully the ramifications of FGM on the body and on the psyche. In Efua Dorkenoo and S. Elworthy's Female Genital Mutilation: Proposals for Change, Dr. T. A. Ba'asher asserts that "'the mere notion of surgical interference in the highly sensitive genital organs constitutes a serious threat to the child and that the painful operation is a source of major physical as well as psychological trauma'" (10). Physically, the removal of clitoral "[t]issue rich in nerve endings" leaves the number of "nerve endings of the remaining genitalia . . . drastically reduced," resulting in a reduced capacity to enjoy sexual relationships (Sanderson, Against the Mutilation 104; Bettelheim, Symbolic Wounds 252). In terms of sexual function, the excision of the clitoris is analogous to the removal of the penis, thereby attenuating, if not obliterating altogether, a woman's sexual desire. Women's "sex organs, though internal and not as easily visible as men's, expand during arousal to approximately the same volume as an erect penis" (Hite, The Hite Report 96). Further, Hite notes that female orgasm is caused by clitoral stimulation, just as male orgasm is caused by "stimulation of the top of the male penis"; both male and female orgasms occur deeper within the lower body in the surrounding genital structures (The Hite Report 99). However, unlike the penis, "which is also employed in reproduction and excretion, the clitoris has no reason beyond pleasure for being" (Bennett," Critical Clitoridectomy" 238). Male insistence on the superiority of the penis/ phallus and the

corresponding inferiority and insignificance of the clitoris reveals a "profound fear of independent female sexual potency" (Bennett, "Critical Clitoridectomy" 250).

Dorkenoo and Elworthy assert that, although "excision of the clitoris reduces sensitivity," sexual desire itself is a "psychological attribute" and therefore, the psychological ramifications are indeterminable:

> We do not know what it means to a girl or woman when her central organ of sensory pleasure is cut off, when her life-giving canal is stitched up amid blood and fear and secrecy, while she is forcibly held down, and told that if she screams she will cause the death of her mother, or bring shame on her family. (Female Genital Mutilation 13, 10)

Conversely, however, the societal and peer pressures to submit to an ancient ritual that tells the child that her vulva is unclean and a threat to the mores of the culture if it is not removed are so great that the young girl "will feel relieved psychologically to be made like everyone else" (Dorkenoo and Elworthy, Female Genital Mutilation 10). This pressure is so great that even Tashi, a grown woman with a supportive husband who did not require FGM to marry her, feels pressure to conform to Olinkan tradition.

In The Circumcision of Women: A Strategy for Eradication, Koso-Thomas lists some of the psycho-sexual problems that can occur as a result of FGM:

> "lack of orgasm" from "amputation of the *glans clitoris*," "frigidity" resulting from fear of the pain of intercourse and fear of defibulation to enlarge the opening, "anxiety" resulting "inbuilt sense of inadequacy to effectively respond to, and satisfy their husband's emotional needs," "depression . . . owing to recurring episodes of frigidity and anxiety. These . . . may lead to mild or moderate psychosis, especially when jealousy of a potential rival for their husband's affection arises." (27-28)

The latter result of psychosis arising out of "jealousy of a potential rival for their husband's affection" is certainly true in Tashi's case. Tashi's genital mutilation causes marital stresses that eventually lead her to separate from Adam for a time and lead Adam to seek friendship and sexual satisfaction elsewhere. He finds both in a relationship with Lisette, a Caucasian French colonialist exiled from Algeria; they meet in Olinka and

continue their friendship in France. Distressed by his relationship with Tashi, Adam feels the need to ask Lisette, a single, modern career woman, about her sex life in order to compare and attempt to normalize his difficult sexual relationship with Tashi (Walker, Possessing 31). Eventually, his questions are answered as the friends become lovers and Lisette becomes pregnant with their son Pierre.

Lisette's pregnancy is a turning point in Tashi's mental health. Lisette notes, "When Evelyn [Tashi] learned of my pregnancy with little Pierre . . . she flew into a rage that subsided into a years-long deterioration and rancorous depression. She tried to kill herself. She spoke of murdering their son" (Walker, Possessing 127). Tashi envies the way that Lisette appears "contented and self-possessed: autonomous in a way I could not imagine for myself" (Walker, Possessing 143). Tashi, in contrast, is full of rage: "I felt the violence rising in me with every encounter with the world outside my home. Even inside it I frequently and with little cause, *no* cause, boxed Benny's ears. If I made him squeal and cringe and look at me with eyes gone grave with love and incomprehension, I fancied I felt relief" (Walker, Possessing 144).

When Adam and Lisette's son, Pierre, comes to stay with them after Lisette's death, Tashi is a "dark spectre," the physical manifestation of the repressed shadow portion of her psyche, who throws stones at Pierre (Walker, Possessing 145). Tashi has collected these stones since she first learned that Lisette had given birth to her husband's son, signifying the fact that she, as a woman, has no socially acceptable outlet for her anger and, as a result, her anger has been growing inside of her for many years until it finally explodes in a hail of stones. Fanny's comments to Suwelo in Walker's The Temple of My Familiar are particularly apropos here as Tashi's inability to express her anger is socially constructed: "'You're large,' she said. 'You're a man. If you feel violent toward someone, you can do something about it. You can be more direct. And you give

yourself permission to feel it. Women are given no such permission'" (Walker, Temple 302). Women can not even permit themselves to feel this anger because they are subject to male social prescriptions which dictate the appropriate ways in which a woman should behave.

What is the outcome of repressed anger? According to Carlotta in The Temple of My Familiar, one outcome is that "'[r]epressed anger leads straight to depression. Depression leads straight to suicide'" (388). Tashi attempts suicide and abuses her body; she does not eat and she cuts herself "on purpose" (Walker, Possessing 144, 82). Adam writes of her self-abusive behaviour:

> *At first she merely spoke about the strange compulsion she sometimes experienced of wanting to mutilate herself. Then one morning I woke to find the foot of our bed red with blood. Completely unaware of what she was doing, she said, and feeling nothing, she had sliced rings, bloody bracelets, or chains, around her ankles.* (Walker, Possessing 51)

The bloody chains she has sliced into her own flesh are reminiscent of the chains worn by African slaves; these wounds are an interesting metaphor that attest to the fact that Tashi is an unwitting slave to the rituals imposed upon her by her culture and a slave to her mutilated body. Tashi, physically and psychologically circumcised, is on a "continuum of pain"; the act of undergoing genital mutilation is not the "singular, absolute" act Adam has always thought (Walker, Possessing 169). There are multiple consequences of FGM just as there are multiple expressions of repressed anger; the other more significant expression is madness or insanity and Tashi's ultimate outlet for her anger is her seemingly insane murder of M'Lissa.

As evident in history and as revealed through Tashi's archetypal dream, FGM is a ritual invented by men in order to control female sexuality. As Lisette tells her son, FGM signifies the "connection between mutilation and enslavement that is at the root of the domination of women in the world" (Walker, Possessing 139). Although bell hooks

is referring to The Color Purple, her commentary on the nature of motherly betrayal applies to Possessing the Secret of Joy as well: "Since the mother is bonded with the father, supporting and protecting his interests, mothers and daughters within this fictive patriarchy suffer a wound of separation and abandonment; they have no context for unity. Mothers prove their allegiance to fathers by betraying daughters" ("Writing the Subject" 226). Out of fear for their own economic and social survival and for that of their daughters, women inflict FGM on their daughters. In order to do this, a mother has to ignore and repress the child in herself that remembers when FGM was done to her; she cannot question the reasons behind it because even to speak of it is taboo.

Silence is the order of the day in the perpetuation of the tradition of FGM. Tashi tells the story of how when Dura was an infant, she was scarred as a result of putting a burning twig between her lips. Physically able to remove the source of her pain, she did not; instead, she cried "*piteously, her arms outstretched, looking about for help. No, they laughed, telling this story, not simply for help, for deliverance*" (Walker, Possessing 10). Dura's cries for help apparently went unheeded as she was scarred as a result of this trauma. This story acts as a metaphor for the ritual of FGM as it is enacted on female children. Just as Dura does not know any better than to put the burning twig in her mouth, young girls are not informed of the ramifications of FGM; essentially, they never know what they are missing because no one has told them what it is that they have lost. The scar left by the burning twig parallels the scar left by FGM; the mouth represents the vulva and the excision and mutilation of the vulva results in silence. To speak of what is done is taboo. To the Olinkans, a female clitoris is worthless flesh--chicken feed--and not worth speaking of.

Luce Irigaray brings an interesting perspective to the male perception of and (de)valuing of female genitalia. She writes, ""Women's genitals are simply absent, masked, sewn back up inside their 'crack'" (Irigaray, This Sex 26). Female genitals, with

their many erogenous areas, allow for an uniquely multiple and plural female sexuality; there is no need to choose, as Freud insisted, "between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity" in a woman's sexual development (Irigaray, This Sex 28).

Unfortunately for the woman, phallomorphism is privileged at the expense of the pleasure provided by female autoeroticism; as Pierre notes, "Man is jealous of woman's pleasure . . . because she does not require him to achieve it" (Walker, Possessing 182). Male jealousy of a woman's multiplicitous sexuality results in its disruption "by a violent break-in: the brutal separation of two hips by a violating penis, an intrusion that distracts and deflects the woman from this 'self-caressing' she needs if she is not to incur the disappearance of her own pleasure in sexual relations" (Irigaray, This Sex 24). In this scenario, only the penis holds value. It is "[t]he *one* of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning . . . [which] supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of *at least two* (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself" (Irigaray, This Sex 26). Unlike the male penis, woman's sexual multiplicity makes her "*neither one nor two* . . . She resists all adequate definition. Further, she has no 'proper' name. And her sexual organ, which is not *one* organ, is counted as *none*. The negative, the underside, the reverse of the only visible and morphologically designatable organ . . . the penis" (Irigaray, This Sex 26). The male insistence on the primacy of male sexuality, that is, sexuality that has the penis as its locus, negates the multiplicitous nature of female sexuality and makes a woman fragmentary, not whole.

In Olinkan culture, a woman's multiple sexuality is negated altogether with the violent and traumatic excision of the external sexual organs and the subsequent sewing together of the remaining skin to form a smooth surface. Having undergone FGM, Tashi truly represents Irigaray's "sex which is not one;" without those pleasure-producing organs which make a woman a multiply sexual being, she is relegated to the male-

prescribed roles of wife and mother. The forced entry of the penis into the now sequestered vagina reinforces the male's dominance over woman's sexuality. She "renounces the pleasure that she gets from the *non-suture of her lips*: she is undoubtedly a mother, but a virgin mother; the role was assigned to her by mythologies long ago. Granting her a certain social power to the extent that she is reduced, with her own complexity, to sexual impotence" (Irigaray, This Sex 30). Tashi's pseudo-immaculate conception of Benny despite the lack of sexual penetration by Adam (showing that he is sensitive to her pain), supports the notion that, indeed, she has become the virgin mother as a result of her renouncing sexual pleasure in order to fit Olinkan cultural expectations.

Tashi is not aware of any of this, however; her naiveté about her own body, her sexuality, and the ritual she decides to undergo is the result of the tradition of silence that prevents discussion of female sexuality and FGM. When Tashi is on trial for her life after killing M'Lissa, Adam comments on the taboo against speaking: "They do not want to hear what their children suffer. They've made the telling of the suffering itself taboo. Like visible signs of menstruation. Signs of woman's mental power. Signs of the weakness and uncertainty of men" (Walker, Possessing 165). The primary question for Adam (and of the novel) is, "*Why is the child crying?*" (Walker, Possessing 165). When Adam and Olivia first meet Tashi she is crying out of grief for Dura, who died that morning at the hands of the *tsunga*. Yet she is told, "*You mustn't cry*," and asserts: "It was a nightmare. Suddenly it was not acceptable to speak of my sister. Or to cry for her" (Walker, Possessing 15). Their mother, Nafa, "fills the emptiness" left by Dura's death with work; she never cries (Walker, Possessing 16).

Tashi's discovery of M'Lissa's rise to a position of renown and respect as an Olinkan patriot for "her unfailing adherence to the ancient customs and traditions" leads her to seek M'Lissa out and murder her out of revenge and as the final expression of her repressed anger (Walker, Possessing 149). M'Lissa's eyes reveal a similar flat gaze to her

own, as if the core of her being had been cut away, which, of course, it has: "Her whole body is smiling her welcome; except for her eyes. They are wary and alert. . . . What is that shadow, there in the depths? Is it apprehension? Is it fear?" (Walker, Possessing 155). Even Walker's interview with an African circumciser reveals this change in the eyes' appearance: "*Many of us notice that a person has been circumcised, because the light in the eyes goes out. There is an absence of light in the eyes*" (Walker, Warrior Marks, 307).

Tashi wonders, incredulously, "How had I entrusted my body to this madwoman?" (Walker, Possessing 151). M'Lissa's stories--like Tashi's, they are means of avoiding the truth--prolong M'Lissa's life for a time. Interestingly, M'Lissa's stories enable Tashi to see the truth of her identity as both Olinkan and American: "An American . . . looks like a wounded person whose wound is hidden from others, and sometimes from herself. An American looks like me" (Walker, Possessing 213).

Tashi recognizes her own wound and through her conversations with M'Lissa enables M'Lissa to come to terms with hers; together they begin a process of psychic healing and Tashi finds that her anger towards M'Lissa dissipates. M'Lissa's mother, a *tsunga*, gave her the gift of a statue showing a female figure touching her clitoris and attempted to allow M'Lissa to keep part of her clitoris; her "mother's disobedience" resulted in a particularly brutal genital mutilation by a witchdoctor and a limping gait (Walker, Possessing 217). As part of her psychological healing process, Tashi examines and rejects the archetypal myth of the termite hill. In its place, she embraces the archetype of the "Creator, Goddess, the Life Force itself" as symbolized in a little masturbatory statue similar to the one M'Lissa's mother gave her (Walker, Possessing 200). The statue is female, "smiling broadly, eyes closed, and touching her genitals" claiming physical self-possession over her body and over her sexuality. Phyllis Chesler asserts that although "[p]hallus-worship is well represented in myth, painting, sculpture,

and modern bedroom practices" and "clitoris-worship and/or non-productive vagina worship is not" (Women and Madness 46). Olivia argues that prior to the subjugation of women, female sexuality was embraced and celebrated; as evidence she describes several examples of ancient paintings and pottery that reveal happy, physically intact women. Prior to her death, reclaiming the statue's original purpose as a teaching tool for young girls, Tashi bequeaths the statue and the gift of knowledge of female sexual self-possession and wholeness to the future daughter of Mbati, a woman whom Tashi has claimed as the daughter she might have given birth to if she had not aborted the baby because of FGM.

In speaking of what she underwent as a child, M'Lissa's own healing begins as she becomes aware of the child in her who was killed at the time she went under the knife:

> I could never again see myself, for the child that finally rose from the mat three months later, and dragged herself out of the initiation hut and finally home, was not the child who had been taken there. I was never to see that child again. . . .
> I finally see her . . . The child who went into the initiation hut . . . I left her there bleeding on the floor, and I came out. She was crying. She felt so betrayed. By everyone. . . . I couldn't think about her anymore. I would have died. So I walked away, limped away, and just left her there. . . . She is still crying. She's been crying since I left. No wonder I haven't been able to. She has been crying all our tears. (Walker, Possessing 222, 225)

M'Lissa allows herself to grieve for her forgotten child-self and this act of crying heals her just as remembering Dura's murder has a healing effect on Tashi: "I felt a painful stitch throughout my body that I knew stitched my tears to my soul. No longer would my weeping be separate from what I *knew*" (Walker, Possessing 83).

Through the figurative process of re-membering, of putting herself--the wounded child and the scarred adult--back together, M'Lissa realizes her role as patriot and protector of Olinkan culture has been nothing more than a mask for her role as a

"torturer[] of children" (Walker, Possessing 226). For Tashi, hearing about M'Lissa's pain--so similar to her own--creates a bond between them and dissipates Tashi's anger towards her. Her ultimate murder of M'Lissa by suffocation is not an act of revenge, but rather an act of completion as Olinkan tradition dictates that someone circumcised by the *tsunga* be her murderer (Walker, Possessing 276). Tashi's belief in this tradition is the reason she is able to tell Olivia that she was not the root cause of M'Lissa's death; M'Lissa "die[d] under her own power"--the power she gained by perpetuating FGM on other women (Walker, Possessing 255).

Tashi's comment that "women are cowards" is corroborated in the courtroom where those taking part in and observing her trial perpetuate the tradition of silence. They do not hear in Tashi's voice or recognize in themselves the crying child Adam's father is concerned about when first they arrive in Olinka. Adam sees each of the courtroom occupants "as the little child my father was always so concerned about, screaming her terror eternally into her own ear" (Walker, Possessing 166). Sadly and to no avail, Tashi screams her terror into the ears of the judges and the courtroom occupants, an act which has the potential but fails to trigger their own painful childhood memories of FGM: "Can you bear to know what I have lost?" (Walker, Possessing 35). She wonders at their deafness: "How could I believe these were the same women I'd known all my life?" (Walker, Possessing 15).

Her position as victim is tenuous, however, because, at least in the world's (and the courtroom's) eyes, she made a conscious and adult, however misinformed, decision to undergo FGM. Additionally, her murder of a cultural icon, M'Lissa, and the tradition of silence that surrounds the underlying reasons for the murder prevent conscious understanding of her position. Even Mzee, perhaps not understanding the cultural pressures placed on her to undergo FGM, feels Tashi needs to take responsibility for her conscious choice as an adult to have her genitals mutilated: "Yours is the pain of the

careless carpenter who, with his hammer, bashes his own thumb" (Walker, Possessing 49). However, as much as Tashi may be the careless carpenter, it is her community, her culture, that is holding the hammer; it insists on FGM as the price of acceptance for women within the culture.

Betrayed by the women in her community and convicted by a patriarchal justice system, her screaming is to no avail and Tashi is convicted to death by firing squad. As a result of her conviction, however, Tashi and her case gain notoriety and attention from foreign media and women's groups. She becomes a martyr for her (and Walker's) cause and a source of strength for women who would like to protect their daughters from FGM but have never been afforded the opportunity to object to it. As a martyr, she has no regrets. She takes full responsibility for her actions and for her decision to undergo FGM as an adult; she comments to Olivia that although she has paid and will pay with her life for her decision, she still stands by her need to assert herself as Olinkan, as other than the outsider position Olivia represents: "Because when I disobey you, the outsider, even if it is wrong, I am being what is left of myself. And that sliver of myself is all I now have left" (Walker, Possessing 254). As an Olinkan woman, subjugated to colonialist influences as well as patriarchal physical mutilation, she is unable to identify with a white colonialist author's comment that "'Black people are natural . . . they possess the secret of joy, which is why they can survive the suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them'" (Walker, Possessing 271). She charges Mbati with finding out what that secret is before she is put to death.

Clearly, the psychic and physical wounding Tashi receives as a result of FGM has not brought out some sort of inner strength or joy inherent to Africans; her wounding resulted in madness, murder, and her eventual physical death. However, Walker's revisioning of mothering subverts the patriarchal process and allows Mbati to find the

answer to Tashi's query about the secret of joy. Although Mzee does not possess a full understanding of the nature of FGM, he does understand the nature of motherly betrayal: "Negro women, the doctor says into my silence, can never be analyzed effectively because they can never bring themselves to blame their mothers" (Walker, Possessing 19). This statement is Walker's starting point in her argument for a community of women and the eradication of FGM and other similar patriarchal oppressions.

Mzee's suggestion that Tashi's psychoanalysis would be more successful if she could blame her mother is a "new thought" which "sets off a kind of explosion" in Tashi's mind" (Walker, Possessing 19). Not yet able to deal on a conscious level with the consequences of this explosion, her mind veers off into fantasy yet again. She imagines the angry leopard that leapt at her mother; yet underlying this revision of her mother's tale of her birth is repressed anger at her mother for perpetuating FGM on her sister and for its cultural acceptance altogether. Effectively, Walker uses Tashi to argue that madness and torture are socially constructed and result in equally insane reactions to these constructions; as Fanny suggests in Temple of My Familiar, people are all "insane;" the "world in which we live" has "tortured" everyone "into a perfect state of madness" (Walker, Temple 388).

Madness is the inevitable result of silence, the means by which FGM is perpetuated. The expression of anger is the means by which the silence is broken and women's voices are heard. As Marianne Hirsch notes, "To be angry is to claim a place, to assert a right to expression and to discourse, a right to intelligibility . . . silence tends to make us uncomfortable because we tend to suspect it conceals anger" ("Clytemnestra's Children" 195). Walker suggests that women's righteous anger at the way in which they have been subordinated and abused by men is the means by which women are able to resist and eradicate FGM and other similar customs. In the Temple of My Familiar, Fanny wonders about "the bottled-up, repressed anger of the African woman, silent for

so long. She thought of this anger as an enormous storehouse of energy and wondered whether the women knew they owned it. Anger can also be a kind of wealth, she thought" (Walker, Temple 267). Madness is the result of Tashi's repressed anger, but she is able to reclaim her sanity as a result of her bonding with the community of women, including M'Lissa.

By redefining what it means to be a mother, Walker inverts the patriarchal process whereby women betray their daughters in order to survive within the culture. Just as Walker redefines virginity for Celie making it possible for Celie to see herself and her sexuality as separate from and outside of patriarchal culture, Walker's refiguration of motherhood as woman-bonding where biological motherhood does not define a woman's ability to mother or nurture other women subverts the patriarchal control imposed by FGM. In a patriarchal culture that permits and, in fact, insists on the subjugation of women's bodies to FGM, the refiguration of what it means to be a mother--that is, a non-biological function--is the key to relieving the oppression and helplessness of women. This refiguration allows women to find solidarity in a non-biological but united female community. Speaking of The Color Purple, hooks notes,

> [I]t is only a vision of sisterhood that makes woman bonding possible. . . . outside the context of patriarchal family norms . . . mothering . . . becomes a task any willing female can perform, irrespective of whether or not she has given birth. Displacing motherhood as central signifier for female being, and emphasizing sisterhood, Walker posits a relational basis for self-definition that valorizes and affirms woman bonding. It is the recognition of self in the other, of unity, and not self in relationship to the production of children that enables women to connect with one another.
>
> The values expressed in woman bonding--mutuality, respect, shared power, and unconditional love--become guiding principles shaping the new community . . . which includes everyone, women and men, family and kin. ("Writing the Subject" 226)

In this figuration, because they are bonded by non-biological motherhood, women are strengthened and able to resist patriarchal oppression. Walker's womanist vision of a

strong female community is seen in several instances of non-biological mothers mothering other women's biological children in both The Color Purple and Possessing the Secret of Joy: Corrine and Nettie mother Olivia's biological children, Adam and Olivia; Celie mothers Alphonso's children; Tashi mothers Mbati.

On the day Tashi faces the firing squad, Mbati, Tashi's family, and Raye unroll a banner that reads, "RESISTANCE IS THE SECRET OF JOY!" (Walker, Possessing 281). Strengthened by her sacrifice and the broken taboo of silence which came as a result of the court case, women sing to support their mutual cause outside the jail and expose the intact genitals of their baby girls at her execution to reveal that her sacrifice has not been an exercise in futility and that there is hope for the next generation. This brings both the novel and Walker's political agenda to eradicate FGM full circle and signifies Tashi's complete psychological healing. At the moment of her death, she is no longer an outsider and her psychic split is healed: "There is a roar as if the world cracked open and I flew inside. I am no more. And satisfied" (Walker, Possessing 281). Tashi's psychological healing and her connection at the moment of her death with the universe reveal Walker's unifying vision for the future and what she perceives as her role as the artist. The protagonist of her novel Meridian offers a glimpse of Walker's holistic and unifying vision of the universe as well as what she perceives as the role of the artist:

> [P]erhaps it will be my part to walk behind the real revolutionaries-- those who know they must spill blood in order to help the poor and the black and therefore go right ahead and when they stop to wash off the blood and find their throats too choked with the smell of murdered flesh to sing, I will come forward and sing from memory songs they will need once more to heal. For it is the song of the people, transformed by the experiences of each generation, that holds them together, and if any part of it is lost the people suffer and are without soul. If I can only do that, my role will not have been a useless one after all. (Walker, 1976, 201)

Walker's sense of responsibility as a writer has led her to write about women's oppression, their escape and healing from it, and women's attainment of sexual and psychological control over their lives and their bodies.

It can be argued that FGM is a tradition that belongs to a culture other than our own and, quite naturally, the question is raised: Who am I to question or judge the longstanding customs of another culture? The term "custom" means "'something we inherited from an untraceable past which has no rational meaning and lies within the realm of untouchable sensitivity of traditional people'" (Gruenbaum, "Movement Against Clitoridectomy" 5). From an anthropological point of view, a culture's customs and rituals do serve a purpose in the sense that they "form a framework of interrelated idioms, a logic of daily life through which reality is ordered and experience mediated" (Gordon, "Female Circumcision" 13). It should be considered here that there are many Western customs which can be seen as unnecessary also, such as plastic surgery, makeup, and restrictive clothing. However, it is Walker's hope that, through her writing and the efforts of other individuals and groups who like to see the eradication of FGM, humanity will gain a greater understanding of the ramifications of FGM and will examine the myths and archetypes that support this "untouchable" custom. Perhaps through education, awareness, and the continued breaking of the taboo of silence, humanity will come to realize that, as Melvin Konner asserts,

> Cultural relativism notwithstanding, . . . [t]hese procedures are mutilations. And since they are done to children, they are also child abuse. . . . Yet millions of little girls are being deprived of the only human organ whose sole function is pleasure, and in the process are being subjected to pain, infection and death. ("Name of Tradition" 6)

Walker argues through her characters that Westerners are collaborators in the perpetuation of FGM. Lisette explains that because the patriarchal domination of women is not physically written on the body in the same mutilating way as it is in African

culture, Westerners become the "perfect audience": "mesmerized by our unconscious knowledge of what men, with the collaboration of our mothers, do to us" (Walker, Possessing 139).

A fine line is drawn between collaboration with the perpetrators of FGM through Western silence and acceptance of FGM as a cultural tradition and the perception that Western efforts to educate and eradicate FGM are colonialist in nature. As Dorkenoo and Elworthy confirm, "Western efforts to eliminate the practice, on the part of missionaries or colonial administrators, have simply served to confirm in people's minds that colonial destruction of traditional customs weakens their societies and exposes them to the ill-effects of Western influence" (Female Genital Mutilation 15). In addition, simple legislation and government efforts to ban FGM do not take into account the social implications for women who do not undergo FGM. Gruenbaum suggests that to obtain effective political change, there needs to be a

> women's movement oriented toward the basic social problems affecting women, particularly their economic dependency, educational disadvantages, and obstacles to employment . . . . To improve women's social and economic security, marital customs must be challenged, and new civil laws are needed to offer additional protection to married and divorced women concerning child custody, rights in marital property, and financial support . . . ("Movement Against Clitoridectomy" 8)

Ideally, this women's movement should come from within the culture affected by FGM due to the perception that outside influences are colonialist in nature.

Clearly, as Jung suggests, "Culture lies outside the purpose of nature" (Jung, Portable Jung 18). Ultimately, Walker argues, one must look past the facts that exist--the fact that the tradition itself exists and the fact that it has existed so long that many people, including those who perpetuate it, no longer remember its origins and accept it without question--and ask the simple question that Walker asks of herself in writing her novels: are we saving the life that is our own? Walker's political agenda for the novel is

simple and obvious; she wants to see the eradication of FGM. She believes, as Olivia expresses in The Temple of My Familiar, that "the child will always, as an adult, do to someone else whatever was done to him when he was a child. It is how we, as human beings, are made" (310). Change can only come about through conscious examination of the archetypes and myths which support the oppression of women in the collective unconscious; Jungian psychoanalysis is the vehicle by which Tashi is psychologically healed and able to achieve selfhood.

Walker's perspective on life is circular. As Pierre explains to Benny that Tashi's death is part of a cycle: "NOTHING = NOT BEING = DEATH. . . . BUT EVERYTHING THAT DIES COMES AROUND AGAIN" (Walker, Possessing 197). Resistance is the secret of joy because it is the vehicle by which change can occur. In her writing and in her life, one of Walker's main preoccupations and interests has been the connection between violence, female sexuality, and patriarchal efforts to subordinate and control women. The themes of patriarchal oppression of women, escape from and healing of these abuses, and the achievement of selfhood are exemplified in Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God. As Washington explains, "female sexuality is always associated with violence. Janie's mother and grandmother are sexually exploited and Janie is beaten by her glorious lover, Tea Cake, so that he can prove his superiority to other men. . . . [This] point[s] to the fundamental issue of whether or not women can exert control over their sexuality" ("Darkened Eye" xxiii). Modeling her work on Hurston's, Walker continues to examine and develop these themes with the goal of universal healing and escape from oppression in mind, as seen in The Color Purple and Possessing the Secret of Joy, as well as her other writing.

Walker identifies herself as an artist within the African American literary tradition and, as such, asserts that it is the artist's responsibility to speak for those oppressed women, African and African American women especially, who cannot speak

for themselves. As she says, "'I was brought up to try to see what was wrong and right it. Since I am a writer, writing is how I right it'" (Bradley, "Novelist Alice Walker" 36).

Notes

1 Andrews argues that the sole diversion from the theme of empowerment came from Booker T. Washington, author of Up From Slavery (1901), in the form of "Tuskegee realism." Rather than focusing on the facts of slavery and its consequences for the African American population, Washington's Tuskegee realism (named after the town of Washington's birth) focused on slavery "as a concept capable of effecting change, of making a difference ultimately in what white people thought of black people as freedmen, not slaves": "The facts of slavery . . . are not so much what happened *then*--bad though it was--as what *makes* things, good things, happen now" (Andrews, "Slavery" 68). Washington reacted to the "turn-of-the-century American 'scientific' racism, which stereotyped 'the Negro as degraded, ignorant, incompetent, and servile" with the assertion that slavery was not "a condition of deprivation and degradation," but "a period of training and testing, from which the slave graduated with high honors and even higher ambitions" (Andrews, "Slavery" 69).

Tuskegee realism is espoused in Washington's Up From Slavery (1901) which emphasizes the opportunities to be gained from the circumstances of slavery, as opposed to the "questioning consciousness of the former slave" expressed in the antebellum slave narrative, i.e., Frederick Douglass' My Bondage and My Freedom (1855) and Harriet A. Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861) (Andrews, "Slavery" 73). Two books in particular, Charles W. Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman (1899) and James Weldon Johnson's The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912), both intentionally undermine the objective stance claimed by Tuskegee realism; the narrators seem fictional, thereby undermining the realism of the narrators' stories (Andrews, "Slavery" 74).

2 In both Dust Tracks on a Road and Their Eyes Were Watching God, there are hints and half-discussions of racial issues, but they are never fully developed because Hurston's status as a writer depends on her acquiescence to the demands of her readership. In the case of the first edition of Dust Tracks on a Road, the final three chapters--"My People, My People!," "The Inside Light--Being a Salute to Friendship," and "Seeing the World As It Is"--were excluded altogether because their discussion of racial issues was considered provocative. In the second edition, they are included as an appendix to the original published version (Braxton, Black Women Writing 146).

3 In his 1943 review of Dust Tracks on a Road, E. Edward Farrison wrote, "'This is not a great autobiography, but it is a worthwhile book'" (Braxton, Black Women Writing 146). Edith Cobb said of the book that it

> fails to sustain the spontaneous 'creative imagination of childhood' [although] there are momentary glimmers of . . . "individual genius" experiencing "a sense of discontinuity, an awareness of [her] own unique

separateness and identity and also a continuity." (Braxton, Black Women Writing 146)

4 A possible source for the revolutionary battle to reclaim tribal lands and hold onto the tradition of FGM as a means of maintaining cultural identity in Possessing the Secret of Joy is Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's novel The River Between. Ngugi indicates that the brothers of the Kenyan Gikuyu tribe "are mistaken in viewing circumcision as a still unsullied source of cultural integrity from which strength can be drawn in preparation for the battles ahead, to repossess the land. . . . For without removal of the clitoris, without 'purity', it is assumed that female sexual energy would threaten the tribe with destruction . . . " (Levin, "Women as Scapegoats" 211).

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